

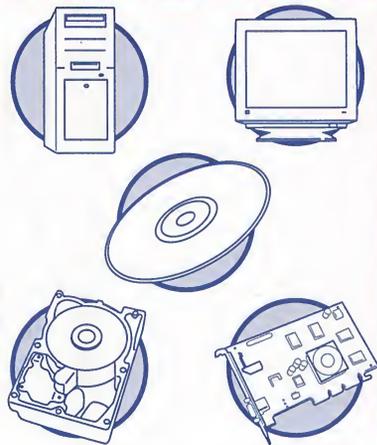
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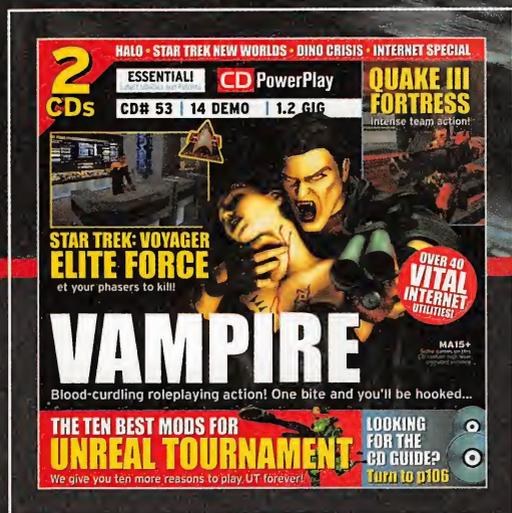
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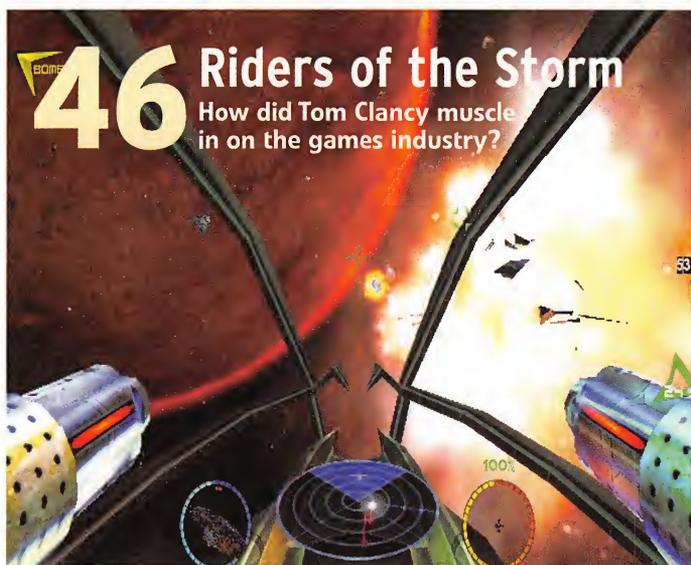
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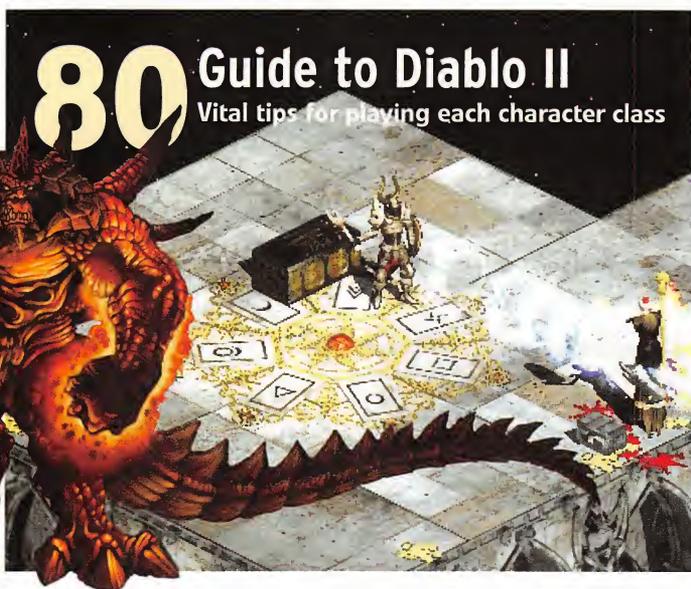
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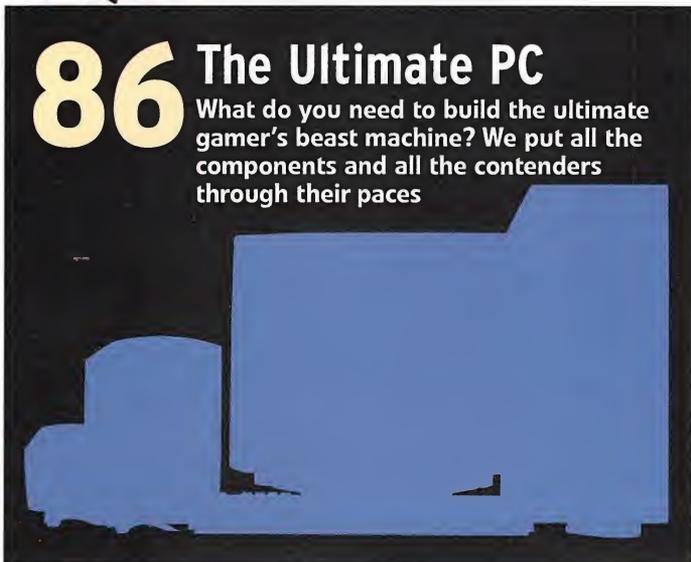
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TRY SOMETHING NEW



Welcome to the new edition of PC PowerPlay. Lifts are on the left, while souvenirs - the PCPP boxer shorts are a particular favourite - can be purchased in the lobby on the right. The concierge will take care of your luggage. I hope you find your stay a most pleasant one.

DAVID WILDGOOSE

An omnipotent wizard upon whose whim the universe is finely balanced.

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Grand Prix 3

Notice anything different? I expect many readers will already have flicked through the issue before returning here - confused? excited? - for an explanation. For those who haven't as yet, I ought to mention we've completely redesigned the magazine, bringing it up to date in a sleek and sexy modern way. It makes perfect sense that a magazine devoted to cutting edge technology should reflect that attitude in its design aesthetic as well.

Over the page you will find our new First Look pages, a section intended to start each month with a bang. This is where you will see all the big, newly announced games unveiled for the first time. Spotlight is next with its usual incisive examination of the month's news stories, and is now followed by the letters page, Inbox.

Apologies to anyone who turned to the Contents page to read the editorial, only to discover what's on p30 of our new internet section. From the early days of geeky young men relaying scientific and academic research across cyberspace to the present situation of geeky young men relaying destructive and quite messy rockets across cyberspace, the internet has become an essential part of all our lives. Hence, we bring you Server (p22), "Your connection to the internet", as we modestly put it.

This month's cover story - The Ultimate PC - heralds the start of a major refocus for our Tech section. Tasked with the coordination of this is Hugh Norton-Smith, who is promoted to Tech Editor as we bid farewell to former Deputy Editor, March Stepnik. Off to spread his gnomish wisdom at a rival publishing house, March will nonetheless still contribute reviews on a regular basis. The first of which is the sterling Baldur's Gate II - check out our World Exclusive review on p52.

Until next month.

david@next.com.au



THE PC POWERPLAY CREW

In keeping with the RPG theme, which character class suits us best?



BRETT ROBINSON

Bard. Comely wenches love a baritone voice...

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Deus Ex



HUGH NORTON-SMITH

A necromancing wood-elf with a +12 attack bonus

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Deus Ex



MARCH STEPNIK

Ideally a Druid, but in reality probably a Xvart

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Baldur's Gate II



HARRY MARAGOS

Porno Actor. Why? Unzip my pants and find out...

WHAT I'M PLAYING

KISS - Psycho Circus



CHANTAL BAIRLE

Has anyone done a rollerskating game yet?

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Bust-A-Groove



ASHLEY MILLOTT

A Goblin Sapper, so I can blow shit up

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Old MAME games



MIKE WILCOX

An Orc. I side with the oppressed and down-trodden

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Deus Ex



MJ DES MCNICHOLAS

I don't care what anyone is as long as I'm Dungeon Master

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Europe in Flames



CHRISTIAN READ

I am classless and beyond your definitions

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Earth 2150



EDWARD FOX

Paladin - I hold honour highest among all virtues

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Grand Prix 3



RYAN HOVINGH

At night, I am an animal - for reasons I won't go into here

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Vampire



JOHN DEWHURST

An elven assassin because no-one will suspect a thing...

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Half-Life Op Force

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EDITORIAL

EDITOR

David Wildgoose <david@next.com.au>

STAFF WRITER

Brett Robinson <brett@next.com.au>

TECH EDITOR

Hugh Norton-Smith <hughns@next.com.au>

ART DIRECTOR

Chantal Bairle <chantal@next.com.au>

DESIGNER

Ashley Millott <ashley@next.com.au>

CD EDITOR

Harry Maragos <harry@next.com.au>

TECHNICAL WRITERS

Daniel Rutter, Seb Fern

CONTRIBUTORS

John Dewhurst, Major Des McNicholas, Edward Fox, Christian Read, March Stepnik, Murray Philbrick, Mike Wilcox, Ryan Hovingh, George Soropos, Rod "Spoonman" Campbell

PHOTOGRAPHER

Scott Wajon

ADVERTISING

GROUP ADVERTISING MANAGER

Simon White <simon@next.com.au>

ADVERTISING MANAGER

Collene Leahy <collene@next.com.au>

ADVERTISING PRODUCTION CO-ORDINATOR

Dylan Fryer <dylan@next.com.au>

NATIONAL SALES DIRECTOR

Victoria Meades <victoria@next.com.au>

BIGWIGS

PUBLISHER

Jim Flynn <jim@next.com.au>

FINANCE DIRECTOR

Theo Fatseas <theo@next.com.au>

CIRCULATION EXECUTIVE

Karen Day <karen@next.com.au>

OPERATIONS MANAGER

Melissa Doyle <melissa@next.com.au>

PRODUCTION CO-ORDINATOR

Caroline May <carolinem@next.com.au>

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Phillip Keir <keir@next.com.au>

SUBSCRIPTIONS ENQUIRIES

SUBSCRIPTIONS

PHONE 1300 36 11 46

FAX 02. 9699 0334

EMAIL <subs@next.com.au>

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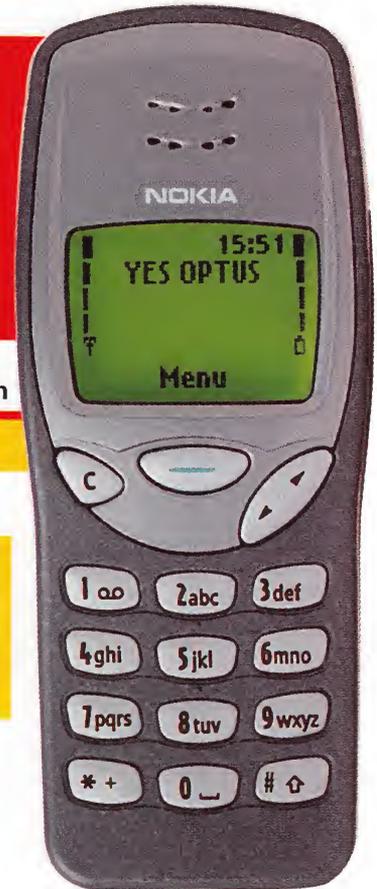
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FIRST LOOK!

Battle Realms

THE OUTSPOKEN ED DEL CASTILLO IS A MAN ON A MISSION TO REDEFINE REALTIME STRATEGY

DETAILS

GENRE

Realtime Strategy

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

DEVELOPER

Liquid Entertainment

PUBLISHER

Crave

DUE

4th Qtr 2001

URL

www.liquid-entertainment.com



Battle Realms' quasi-Asian setting is refreshing when compared to its rivals



➔ Ed Del Castillo is a veteran of the games industry and the strategy genre in particular. He is perhaps best known for his work on the original Command & Conquer, although he has previously and since worked on a whole host of well-known strategy and non-strategy games.

Unhappy with where the RTS genre was headed, and tired of cautious iteration after cautious iteration of the same formula he helped define those many years ago, Del Castillo formed Liquid Entertainment and assembled a willing team to attempt to make serious inroads in the evolution of the RTS.

One way Del Castillo hopes to achieve this is by steering gameplay away from what he calls the "Realtime Economy" (RTE)

element so prevalent in the genre. According to Del Castillo, RTE is "what you usually play when you think you're playing an RTS. Think about it - how many games have you played where the combat was relatively unimportant, and the game was won based on how quickly you built units, not on how well you used them? The formula is mindless: grab your units, throw them at the enemy, go back to your base, build more units, and repeat... The only important thing is out-producing the enemy."

So Battle Realms is being designed as an RTS harbouring a strong combat and strategy focus, with RTE elements forming the backbone in acknowledgment that resource management is an integral part of the experience.

WHY BATTLE REALMS DEMANDS A SECOND LOOK...

- ◀ A "Kung-fu" fantasy setting with an anime style
- ◀ The environment will have an effect on player strategy
- ◀ Heavy use of "special" units and character
- ◀ A stronger focus on combat

Birds in the bush

However, it's not only the combat units of Battle Realms which will carry Liquid's exciting design goals. According to Del Castillo, the project mantra for Battle Realms from day one has been "the world is alive"; effects be aesthetically pleasing - they'll

Firstly, not only will the environmental from day one has been "the world is alive"; exciting design goals. According to Del Castillo, the project mantra for Battle Realms from day one has been "the world is alive"; effects be aesthetically pleasing - they'll

Units will also have true line of sight other RTS' promote.

negate the disposable attitude so many the ability to heal over time, which should employed by the player - and given units allowing for more strategies to be combat - thus lengthening skirmishes and down the rate of damage units inflict in To achieve this focus, Liquid has slowed

example, forests will provide cover from enemy eyes for your warriors. Should you not advance with caution (as sneaking through a forest for cover implies), you may disturb flocks of birds which will give away your position when they flee from your path.

Secondly, the "living resource system" being implemented should allow for interesting resource management dilemmas. Rather than engaging in basic exchanges (use resource x to create unit/building y), players will have to decide how to best use the handful of resources present in the Battle Realms world. For example, water can be collected and used to speed the growth of rice (which is the primary food resource, an abundance of which increases the player's population) to obvious effects. However, should the enemy set your village on fire, water can be used to extinguish the flames, begging for a reserve. Horses too prove an interesting resource to manage - should one prepare them for battle (giving your units combat advantages) or should the beast be sent to the rice fields, where they can further speed the production of rice? At least, the choice to give real-world

March Stepnik

relationships and meaning to the resource system should make BR's RTE a more intuitive affair. Given Liquid's collective experience and the passion with which the BR team is approaching Battle Realms, don't be surprised if they manage to create an absolutely enjoyable realtime strategy experience.



Battles of attrition will make for a pleasant change from typical RTS fare

Horses used in battle will be less efficient means your farming



FIRST LOOK!

Red Faction

WELCOME TO THE FPS THAT SAYS, "IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE LEVEL DESIGN, JUST DESTROY IT."

DETAILS**GENRE**

Firstperson Action

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

DEVELOPER

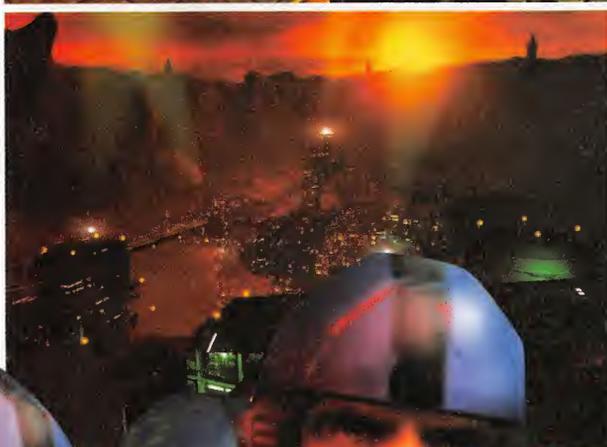
Volition

PUBLISHER

THQ

DUE

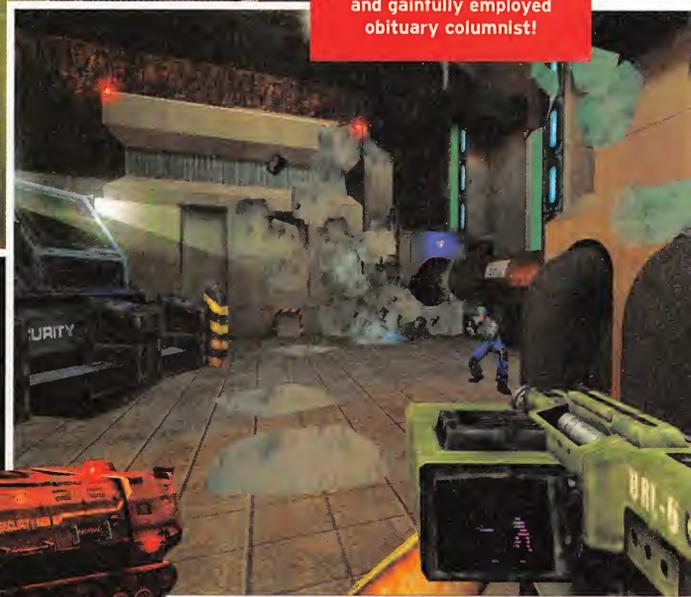
1st Qtr 2001

URLwww.redfaction.com

Before: three loyal company men fighting for the Ultor Corporation



After: three smoking craters and gainfully employed obituary columnist!



➔ Volition, the team responsible for the award-winning *Descent* series, is currently developing *Red Faction* for the PC (and, if anyone's still interested, the PlayStation 2). In this quite literally ground-breaking title, they've achieved what many designers regard as the holy grail of first-person shooters: a fully interactive/destructible environment.

Known as GeoMod technology, players will not only be able to obliterate their opponents, but do damage to their surroundings. GeoMod is, quite frankly, one of those technological advances that will change games forever. Besides looking fantastic, the technology will have an enormous impact upon gameplay. Imagine, for instance, shooting a wall out behind a camper with an infra-red rocket launcher, or destroying the support struts of a command tower to kill the sniper lurking within.

The hyper-realistic physics engine is even able to model wind in realtime, meaning sparks, smoke, and other particles will be affected by the prevailing breeze. Additional features include the ability to control vehicles, interact with advanced enemy AI, and choose from a vast array of science-

fiction weaponry. From what we witnessed at E3, it all looks very impressive.

Smash the state

In addition, the single-player storyline in *Red Faction* looks set to rival *Half-Life*. With cavalier disregard for cliché, the plot involves the usual mish-mash of monolithic mega-corporations, conspiracy theories, etcetera. The Ultor Corporation has established a terraforming station on Mars, the Red Planet. You take the role of Parker, a disgruntled worker for the Ultor Corporation. In a move to improve the living and working conditions of space miners everywhere, you form a paramilitary union which opposes Ultor's nefarious operation. Called the 'Red

Faction', this motley crew of work-shy miners starts a rebellion in the hope of escaping the horror on Mars.

The game promises a multi-threaded storyline, à la *Deus Ex*, with a dash of stealth-tactics thrown in. Naturally, multiplayer is a given: the developer claims that GeoMod will have an enormous impact upon multiplayer tactics. Consider a deathmatch beginning in a huge, elaborate cathedral structure. By the conclusion of this particularly violent skirmish, the cathedral would be razed to the ground, and the victor would be left standing in a pile of smoking rubble...

Red Faction is a hugely ambitious game, but with Volition's solid record we remain confident that it will rock. Hard.

Hugh Norton-Smith



WHY RED FACTION DEMANDS A SECOND LOOK...

➔ The GeoMod technology sounds simply awesome

➔ Socialism is clearly alive and well in the future

➔ Volition has an impeccable history behind it

➔ It should be out before Duke Nukem Forever...

13 New Lara!



14 Z2



16 Mafia



Spotlight

THE LATEST GAME NEWS AND VIEWS

A role in Star Wars?

BALDUR'S GATE CREATOR LEAVES ORCS BEHIND



Bioware, in conjunction with LucasArts has announced securing the rights to make a roleplaying game set in the Star Wars universe.

After the fiasco that was Star Wars: Force Commander, LucasArts is under increasing pressure from Star Wars aficionados to do justice to the perennially popular franchise. Star Wars RPG, which remains the codename for Bioware's game, fits the bill nicely. Fresh from finishing Baldur's Gate II, Bioware have a reputation for quality development titles, so we're confident of the results.

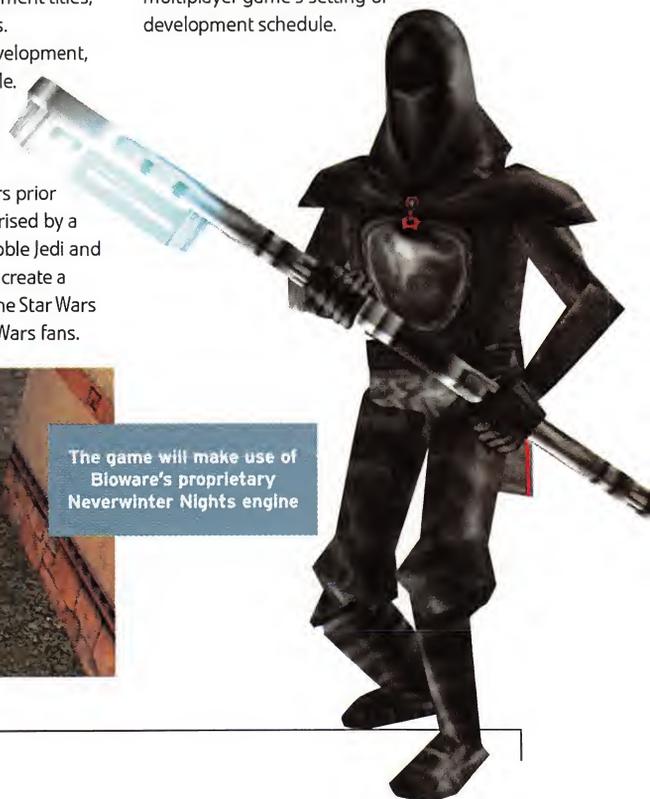
Still in the early phase of development, there is little to say about the title. However, we do know that LucasArts and BioWare are creating a completely original storyline set four thousand years prior to Episode I. The era is characterised by a power-struggle between the noble Jedi and the evil Sith. The opportunity to create a richly detailed new chapter in the Star Wars universe should appeal to Star Wars fans.

Although currently planned as a single-player game, BioWare hasn't ruled out the possibility of adding multiplayer function as the development process matures. LucasArts will publish and distribute the game for release in 2002.

Of note, this is not the only Star Wars RPG in development. Verant and Sony Online have previously announced plans to develop Star Wars Online. As with Bioware's game, there are few details as to the massively multiplayer game's setting or development schedule.



The game will make use of Bioware's proprietary Neverwinter Nights engine



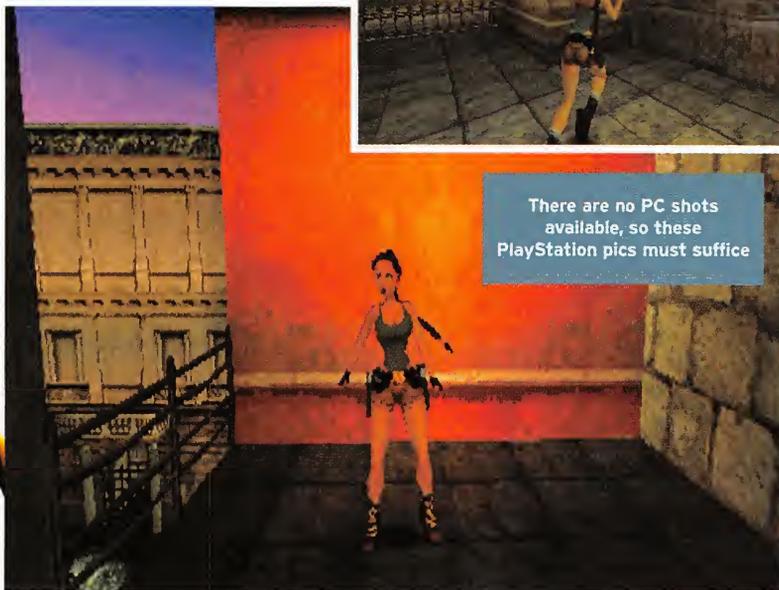
Lara's Not Dead

MS CROFT IS ALIVE IN TOMB RAIDER V

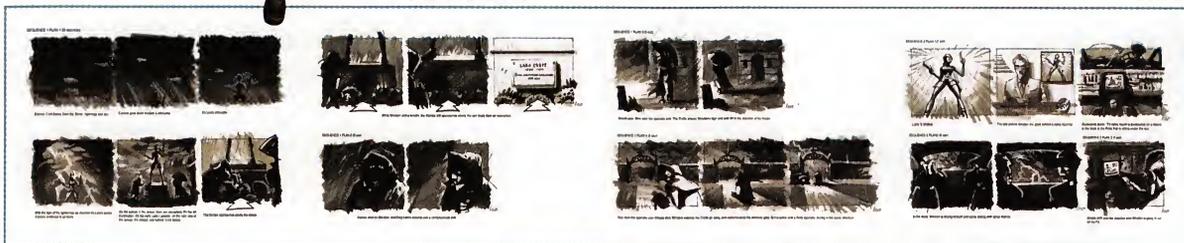
Developer Core Design and publisher Eidos Interactive have unveiled the next annual instalment in the Adventures of Lara Croft.

Tomb Raider V picks up where the now erroneously named Last Revelation left off, with Lara seemingly dead. A sneak peek at the storyboard for the new game's opening scene reveals Mr and Mrs Croft laying a wreath at the base of a statue constructed in Lara's honour and a TV news report commemorating her untimely death.

However, as these PlayStation screenshots betray, she isn't really dead at all (*Hey, surprise me - Ed*). We will discover how she survives sometime in November.



There are no PC shots available, so these PlayStation pics must suffice



FRYING RUMOURS
Word is that Fox Interactive has started work on a couple of games based on its parent company's TV shows. It's thought that there is a Futurama game and another X-Files tie-in on the drawing board.

Our spy at Eidos managed to escape with these concept sketches for Tomb Raider V

Can Irrational create the first decent super-hero game?



Freedom Force

SHODAN TO SUPER-HERO IN A SINGLE BOUND

Irrational Games Australia has announced its first game since the new Canberra-based studio was established in April this year. Freedom Force is the title of the super-hero flavoured RPG from the creator of System Shock 2. The game is set in the 1960s and features a troupe of comic book style action heroes similar to the X-Men. Utilising an advanced 3D engine, a key element is the potential to destroy or deform much of the world's terrain and environment. The roleplaying aspects are evident in the freedom the player has to choose and grow his heroes' special powers. Expect this one towards the end of next year.

AvP 2

IT'S BROWN TROUSERS TIME AGAIN

Rebellion Software has announced a sequel to the acclaimed Aliens vs Predator, regarded by many as one of the most harrowing firstperson action games.

Other than a few hints at possible directions and the revelation of a handful of concept sketches, little concrete information about the game is available.

However, we do know that AvP 2 will feature a conventional savegame system, unlike the original. The sequel will also offer a more varied gameplay experience in an effort to give the player an opportunity to catch his breath - something rarely allowed in the first.

Publisher Fox Interactive anticipates the game to be ready come late next year.



NEW STUDIO

Pandemic, creators of Dark Reign 2, may soon be opening a development studio here in Australia. Although the details have yet to be finalised, the most likely location for the studio will be Brisbane, where real estate prices are not as prohibitively expensive as in Sydney and Melbourne.

TOO VIOLENT

In yet another blow to proponents of the rational classification of computer games, the Canadian province of British Columbia recently reclassified Soldier of Fortune as an Adult Motion Picture. This rather ill-conceived move effectively restricts the sale of the game to premises licensed to sell adult material. As such, adult book stores and video stores will be the only retail outlets who are able to legally sell the game in that province.

Z2

THE SHORTEST GAME NAME EVER DOUBLES IN SIZE

Veteran gamers may fondly remember Z, the Bitmap Bros' RTS released right around the time C&C hit shelves. Since then, the Bros have all but disappeared from the gaming scene, but recently re-emerged to announce the development of Z2.

Z2 will stay true to its arcade-style RTS roots, but will be entirely 3D, and will feature a new resource management system that will replace the territory-based system of the original. No word yet on a release date, but

early screenshots seem to indicate that Z2 may rival Ground Control in the absolutely stunning visuals department.



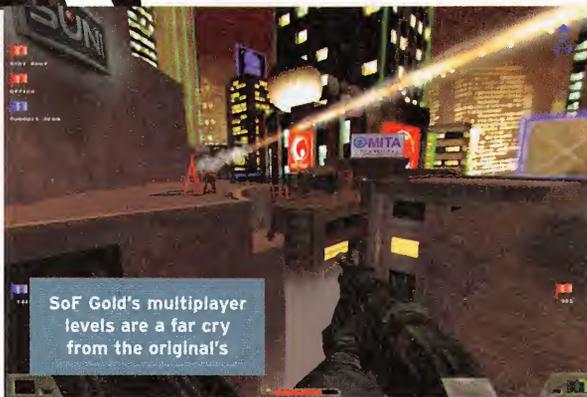
The battlefield environments range from blistering deserts to fertile forests

Add-ons

NEW EXPANSIONS COMING

Battle Tactics, the hotly anticipated add-on for SWAT 3, has undergone an interesting change. Rather than being offered as an add-on pack for owners of SWAT 3, the extra levels, equipment and multiplayer capabilities will be combined with the original game and offered as a retail pack known as Elite Edition. For those who already own SWAT 3, a patch enabling multiplayer capability and additional kit items will be available for download free of charge. Unfortunately, owners of SWAT 3 who wish to play with the new levels will have to fork out for Elite Edition, which will undoubtedly be sold at full retail price.

Devotees of the decidedly macabre Soldier of Fortune are due for a treat in the form of the soon-to-be-released Gold Edition. SOF Gold will allow players to compete in deathmatch and teamplay multiplayer sessions, and will contain between 15 and 20 multiplayer levels. It will also significantly revamp the rather sketchy AI of the adversaries in the game's single player component. SOF Gold will be offered as a retail package and as a free downloadable upgrade for owners of SOF.



SOF Gold's multiplayer levels are a far cry from the original's

Using the recently released Software Development Kit for Deus Ex, work has begun in earnest on a cooperative multiplayer RPG tentatively named Contra Deus Ex. Start-up development studio, Alpha Interactive, claim that their game's epic storyline will span the globe, from Spain to Japan. As well as offering new environments and a completely new play dynamic, Contra Deus Ex will feature new special items, unique items, new weapon enhancements and wearable armour - all of which will show on the player's character model. These, combined with new skills, weapons, nanoaugmentations and AI enhancements, make Contra Deus Ex one of the most promising Deus Ex mods in development.

WIN!

HAVE YOU BEAN TO THE DALE?

Those insanely generous people at Interplay have given us loads of funky Icewind Dale beanies! So many, in fact, that to count them all would be an endeavour we couldn't be bothered undertaking. If the thought of wandering

about in the middle of summer with a woollen hat on appeals to you, then send your entry, along with your suggestion for the best possible use for a beanie to:

My Head is Freezing!

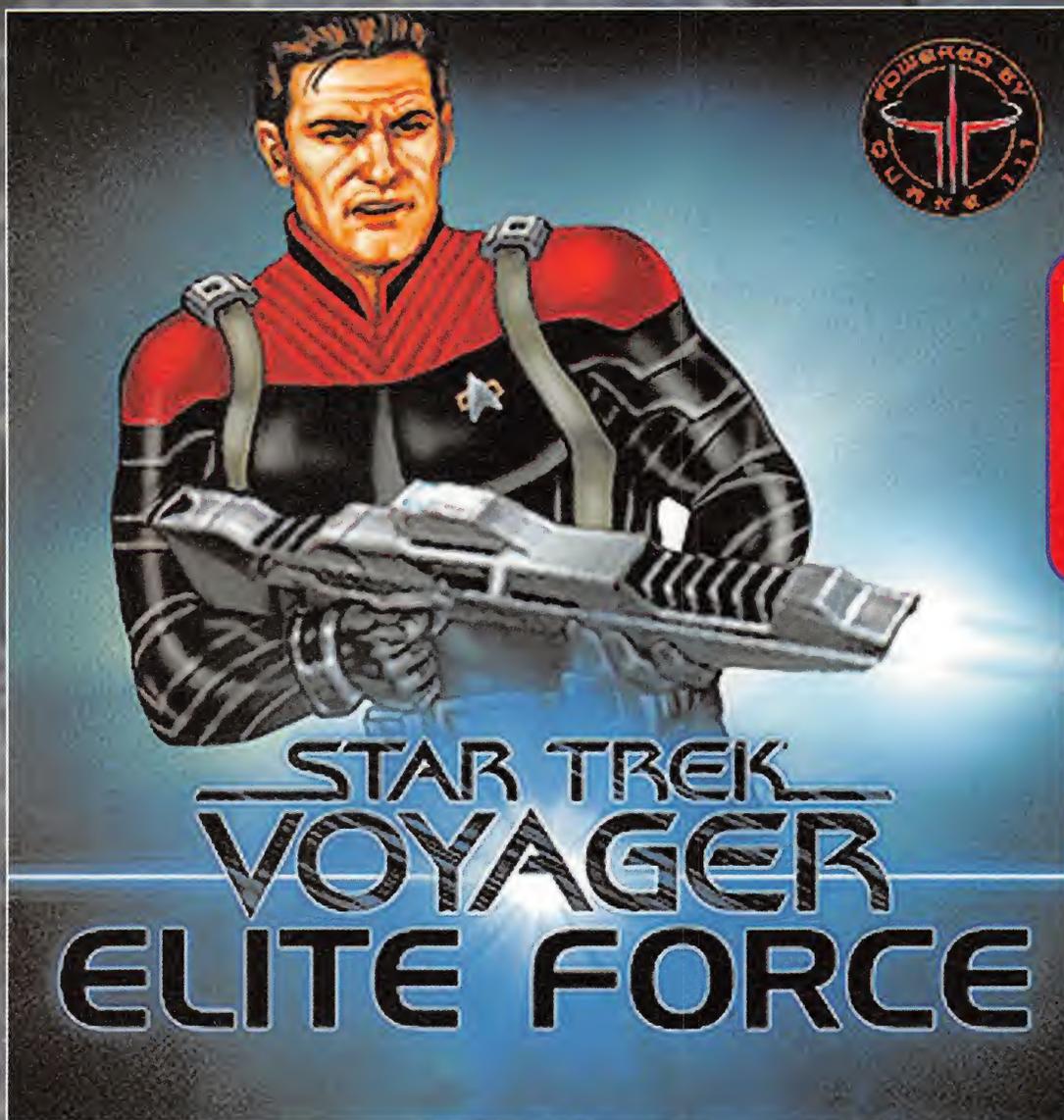
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Put your answer on the back of the envelope, please.



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FLASHPOINT

From Czech developer Bohemia Interactive - and bearing a marked similarity to fellow countrymen Illusion Softworks' Hidden & Dangerous - comes Flashpoint 1985. It's tactical, firstperson action with a contemporary twist and plenty of military hardware to play with.

PLAYING CHICKEN

A previously unheard of studio called iRock Interactive is working on an Ozzy Osborne game. The brave license is alleged to feature "a next-generation graphics engine, coupled with groundbreaking artwork, and a riveting storyline."

0414-Gaming

GO ADVENTURING WITH YOUR MOBILE

Mobile phone giant, Nokia, has announced the launch of their Mobile Entertainment Development Program. This strategic partnership with numerous game development companies (including Activision) will see classic text-based adventure games like The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Zork and Plantefall made available to owners of WAP (Wireless Application Protocol) enabled mobile phones. Oxford Softworks will also create several board games for the pioneering program. How long owners of Nokia's Matrix-style 7110's will have to wait for these games to become available, how much they will cost, and whether they will eclipse the popularity of traditional favourites like Snake, remains to be seen. But such developments certainly bode well for proponents of portable entertainment.



WIN!

DRIVE HOME IN THE GENERAL LEE

With the release of The Dukes of Hazzard just around the corner, we're offering you the chance to win an authentic die-cast metal replica of the famous General Lee courtesy of the game's publisher and distributor, Ubisoft. It's been autographed by cast member Ben Jones, who played Bo and Luke's favourite mechanic in the TV series.

To win the General Lee, as well as a three vehicle set including Boss Hogg's Cadillac and Roscoe P. Coltrane's police car and a copy of the game, answer the following question:

WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THE CHARACTER PLAYED BY BEN JONES IN THE DUKES OF HAZZARD?

Put your answer on the back of an envelope and send your entry to:

General Lee Comp

PC PowerPlay
78 Renwick St
Redfern NSW 2016



Classic cars are the highlight of this throwback to the 30s

Mafia

TIME TO SLIP INTO SOME CONCRETE SHOES

The developer of Hidden & Dangerous has revealed plans for its next game, an action/adventure entitled Mafia.

Few would deny that the 1930s were the epitome of style. Pinstripe suits, beautiful automobiles, speak-easies: the 30s had it all. Czech developer, Illusions Softworks, is recreating the style and grandeur of the era, and combining it with another characteristic of the 30s - organised crime. Mafia will allow players to revel in that age of concealed Tommyguns and bootleg liquor, extorting shop owners and assassinating rival gangsters at the bidding of the Don.

The promise of an unrivalled level of immersion has us crossing our fingers in the hope that Mafia remains on track for its Xmas 2000 release.



Challenge Yourself

\$54⁹⁵

Ultima Online: Renaissance.

An updated release of the Ultima Online game that includes new and enhanced features such as expanded land divided into Player Vs Player consensual and Player Vs Player enhanced areas, a party system for grouping your friends as well as various enhanced skills. Enjoy battling dangerous beasts that after years of battle have learned a few tricks, offering you an even more challenging experience.

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Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force

Coming soon...

PCPP'S ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE GAMING MONTHS AHEAD

SEPTEMBER

- Anachronox (Ozisoft)
- Baldur's Gate 2 (Interplay)
- Blair Witch Vol.1 (Jack of all Games)
- Crimson Skies (Microsoft)
- Heavy Metal: FAKK2 (Jack of all Games)
- Midtown Madness 2 (Microsoft)
- Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force (Activision)
- The Sims Livin' Large (Electronic Arts)
- Tony Hawk 2 (Activision)

OCTOBER

- Alice (Electronic Arts)
- Blair Witch Vol.2 (Jack of all Games)
- Colin McRae Rally 2 (Ozisoft)
- Dirt Track Racing (Jack of all Games)
- MechWarrior (Microsoft)
- No One Lives Forever (Electronic Arts)
- Rune (Jack of all Games)
- Tribes 2 (Havas)

NOVEMBER

- Alone In The Dark 4 (Infogrames)
- B-17 2: The Mighty Eighth (Hasbro)
- Black & White (Electronic Arts)
- C&C Red Alert 2 (Electronic Arts)
- Giants: Citizen Kabuto (Interplay)
- Oni (Jack of all Games)
- Star Topia (Ozisoft)

DECEMBER

- Commandos 2 (Ozisoft)
- Hitman (Ozisoft)
- Loose Cannon (Microsoft)
- MechCommander 2 (Microsoft)
- Obi-Wan (Playcorp)
- Return to Castle Wolfenstein (Activision)
- Sacrifice (Interplay)
- The World Is Not Enough (Electronic Arts)
- X-Com: Alliance (Hasbro)



Loose Cannon

Australia's most wanted

There is a definite changing of the guard this month. Once worthy challengers, both Warcraft 3 and Team Fortress 2 have taken a dive, their "wanted-ness" diminished by their equally interminable delays. Quite how Duke managed to survive similar troubles and clinch the top spot in Diablo II's absence is a bit of a mystery, though. Just below, anticipation for Baldur's Gate II is rapidly mounting - it'll be out in a few weeks, we promise! Good to see Black & White doing well, as it's one of the few original games amid an endless sea of sequels and clones. And hopefully Bungie will note that Halo actually increased its share of the vote after last month's announcement regarding its jump to the X-Box...

This month's winner, Clinton Perry of Ermington, NSW, has collected a copy of Sacrifice for taking the time to vote. No relation to Dave, by any chance?



Send your Top Five Most Wanted Games to PC Powerplay at: wanted@pcpowerplay.com.au

- 1 **DUKE NUKEM FOREVER**
- 2 Baldur's Gate 2
- 3 Black & White
- 4 Warcraft 3
- 5 Halo
- 6 Team Fortress 2
- 7 Commandos 2
- 8 Star Trek: Elite Force
- 9 Freelancer
- 10 Alone in the Dark

Hall of fame

PCPP'S MOST RECENT GOLD AWARDED GAMES - BUY THEM ALL!



● Score 90 ● Issue #52

Ground Control

Jack Of All Games

Swedish developer Massive redefines realtime strategy with intense tactical combat and a glorious 3D engine.



● Score 98 ● Issue #51

Deus Ex

Ozisoft

Is it an RPG? Or is it an FPS? Deus Ex lets you decide how you want to play it. The best game of all time, in our humble opinion.



● Score 91 ● Issue #50

Enemy Engaged

Distributor

Realistic physics and an excellent campaign make this the finest helo sim ever made. Flight sim of the year so far.



● Score 92 ● Issue #50

Shogun: Total War

Electronic Arts

Demanding swift tactical acumen and heavy strategic thought in equal amounts, Shogun is deep wargaming without peer.



● Score 95 ● Issue #49

Thief II: The Metal Age

Ozisoft

Learn to think before you act and you will find Thief II to be one of the most immersive gaming experiences yet.

Our most wanted



Black & White

It's a monkey thing



Commandos 2

Sprechen ze Deutsch?



Star Trek: Elite Force

Check the demo



Giants

Stay beautiful

CHARTS

THE SIMS REMAINS #1 FOR THE 5TH MONTH IN A ROW

A number of celebrated games round out the top selling titles for this month, with The Sims steadfastly refusing to relinquish its position in the top slot. Age of Empires II comes in once again at number two, with the fantastic Shogun: Total War making an impressive debut in the top five. Interestingly, sales of budget and platinum titles have skyrocketed, and these games now dominate the top twenty. With the exception of Soldier of Fortune and Rollercoaster Tycoon, games released in recent months are quite conspicuous by their absence.

The Official Australian PC Games Chart

Compiled by Inform in association with AVSDA

June 2000

Top 20 Best Selling PC Games

Position	Game Title	Game Type
1	↔ The Sims	Strategy
2	↔ Age Of Empires 2	Strategy
3	↔ Cmmnd. & Cnqr. Tiberian Sun	Strategy
4	★ Shogun:Total War	Strategy
5	↑ Sim Mania Pack	Bundle
6	↓ Soldier Of Fortune	Action
7	★ Need for Speed 3	Racing
8	★ Dark Reign Platinum	Strategy
9	★ Croc	Platform
10	↓ Imperium Galactica 2	Strategy
11	★ Civilization 2 Test Of Time	Strategy
12	↑ Army Men Platinum	Strategy
13	★ Cmmnd. & Cnqr. Red Alert	Strategy
14	↑ Freddi Fish I Platinum	Family
15	★ Unreal Platinum	Action
16	★ Sim City Unlimited	Strategy
17	★ Sim City 2000 Special Ed	Strategy
18	↓ Space Invaders Platinum	Action
19	★ Flight Sim 2000 Std	Simulator
20	★ Rollercoaster Tycoon	Strategy

inform

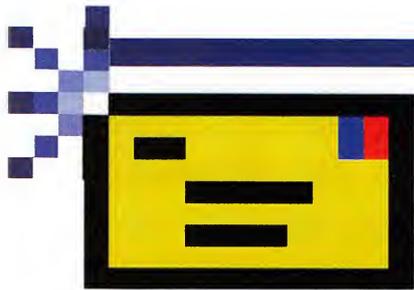
★ -New entry

↑ -Up from last month

↔ -Non mover

↓ -Down from last month

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INBOX

Letters Page Tip: Keep sending in those Dalderby's!

Write to: PC PowerPlay Letters, 78 Renwick St, Redfern 2016. Email: letters@pcpowerplay.com.au



Warcraft 3: a sequel too far?

Shelves with remakes

Is it just me or is the gaming market becoming one big sequel? Take Australia's Most Wanted in PCPP#50 for example. What do you see there? Diablo 2, Team Fortress 2, Warcraft 3, Baldur's Gate 2, Grand Prix 3 and Motocross Madness 2. Now most of these are good games, but why, oh why can't the game designers come up with original games! Surely that would be a better idea than clogging up the stores and shelves with remakes of games that are years old.

Michael Pullman

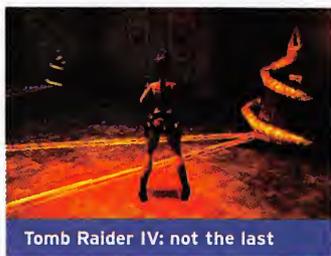
But you will buy them anyway, won't you...

BYTE SIZE

Soon there will be several Microsofts. That's enough to take over the world as we know it. The day they split Microsoft was the day justice did not prevail. I hope they win on appeal. By the way, I love Microsoft.

Grant Steele

Enjoy the imminent hate mail.



Tomb Raider IV: not the last

Game about Lara

I am a person who likes games and their end sequences. But what I have seen at the end of Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation was not pleasing to the eye, well my eye anyway. As most of you would know, in TLR, Lara Croft's life appears to sadly come to an end. (Snipped lengthy description of Lara's apparent demise - Ed.)

Now I believe that Lara Croft is a survivor and that she will somehow get herself out of that shit-stained tomb. I for one hope that Core Design and Eidos make another game about Lara escaping from the tomb and finding a way to kill that bastard Set. But honestly, please tell me that Lara is not gone for good. Please find out if Core and Eidos will be bringing Lara back to life.

Damien Hopkinson

Your naivete is most endearing. Of course Eidos/Core are working on another Tomb Raider game - Tomb Raider 5, just in case you were wondering.

Threw the mouse

A warning to all gamers. Do not let your father play Commandos. In my case he kicked the bejeezas out of the computer and there is a scratch on the monitor where he threw the mouse at it trying to make the Green Beret follow orders.

Chris Haspell

BYTE SIZE

I love music by ABBA, I love music by the Bee Gees, I love everything about the 70s, and last, but definitely not least, I love PC Powerplay! It's nice to read a computer mag that it not only intellectually challenging to read, but also has pretty pictures...

Sunday Night Fever

We're not entirely happy to be put in such company.

Will the great guys

I just want to ask you guys a quick question, if I may oh Almighty Masters of the machine that they call a PC. When the X-Box is released will you be including a section in your marvellous magazine or will the great guys at Next Gaming produce another great chronicle by the name of X-PowerPlay or something like that?

Peter Willman

We'll certainly cover the X-Box in some form, but the extent of that coverage will depend on two things: the console's success and whether you guys want it or not. Let us know.

BYTE SIZE

The only humour that's left is captions and letters!

Brendan Markey

And now only the captions...

Back into the ranks

I am a reformed pirate. That's right, I am a re-educated gamer. I've finally realised that you can never get the same type of satisfaction out of a game that you payed \$5 for that you can for one that you worked hard for. \$90 is a steep price, but then again it only serves to make one more careful in his or her choices of games. Just a couple of days ago I bought Unreal for \$30 (in the Platinum range). I own a CD burner, and am proud of it. But now it is only used for making backups of important CDs and important files.

Your magazine has always championed honest gamers, and all that I can ask is that you all will accept me back into the ranks of true gamers. It takes courage to admit that you are wrong, and I applaud any other people who are like myself realising that being a pirate is not the way to solve ones gaming woes. So S.C.U.M (Stop Copying Unauthorised Material)!

Tim Lee

Group hug!

BYTE SIZE

The bots in Unreal Tournament are murderous compared to Quake III's poor AI (check the first level on the first skill). UT's boss (Xan Kriegore) is damn impossible even on the first skill!

Anthony Richardson

Well, that's sorted then.



LETTER OF THE MONTH

Blame the media

In response to Aaron (Overexposure, PCPP#50) - what is your problem? You complain that gaming sites and magazines are giving you too much information about upcoming games. Blizzard is not forcing Diablo 2 screenshots down your throat. You are the one seeking them out and downloading them. Don't want to know anything about a game until it's released? Don't visit websites dedicated to it. Skip the PCPP Previews. Exercise some personal initiative. Don't just blame the media.

Personally, I love information. It's great to know that Diablo 2 is just

going to be more of the same, that Deus Ex is breaking the mould, that Ground Control does not involve base building and is focused on tactical combat. I appreciate the information because for me it never comes close to capturing the full experience of the title.

Brad Carletti

We think that previews are nearly as important as the reviews themselves when it comes to guiding your purchasing decisions. Which is why we'll continue to fill our pages with as many of them as possible.



BYTE SIZE

I'm not aloud too much internet time, so I use the only few games that have it.

SuwField

To judge from your spelling, even that's too much time...

Petrified to go

I just wanted to know if anybody has had the same problem with System Shock 2 as I did. It's the bit where it scares the shit out of you and makes you absolutely petrified to go anywhere near the computer. No seriously, I am not kidding.

Matt Snow

We remember that bit only too well, Matt.

Tragic as the fall

As I sit reading the various arguments that dance around the issue of software piracy, I dare, in my own twisted way, to consider the deeper meaning of computer gaming. I'm only too ready to recognise that I know bugger all about psychology, but like Freud, I think it's all got to do with sex. By sex, I don't mean the titillation that comes from that short time involved in consummating "the act", but rather the whole experience of desire, lust, pursuit, acquisition, consummation and afterglow.

Regardless of the genre, there are many games that supply this excitement and reward, games that keep you coming back again and again and again. These are games like Age of Empires, Age of Kings, Diablo, Fallout, Harpoon, Doom, Quake, Myth, System Shock,

Civilization, and a list of others usually rewarded with Gold or Platinum recognition by your magazine.

And then, sadly, we have the bad sex games. Those prematurely released to the public (any game with the word Ultima in the title and released since 1995, Sin, Battlecruiser 3000, etc). Games that appear to be suffering a social disease (rely on gore instead of depth), and games that I would call Hollywood sex. With Hollywood sex games the glitz is there, the glamour, perhaps even a video or a sexy looking demo, but then when the time comes to get down and get dirty, the game falls apart like a cheap whore. There is no depth, no gameplay, nothing to make you want to come back, and only regrets for the money wasted on the enterprise. These games are all the more tragic as the fall is greater because your expectations are so much higher. It's like winning a no-holds-barred date with a supermodel and then finding out she's a transvestite (not that there's anything wrong with transvestites!). (*Good to see transgendered gaming alive and well - Ed.*)

BYTE SIZE

I played Dink Smallwood, that had great gameplay and not the best quality graphics. I downloaded many maps for it as well.

Lindon Drake

Harry will be pleased.

Of course, with these bad sex games, you really have no recourse, and I could do some serious upgrading to my computer system with the money I've wasted on these. You can't return them, letters to the publishers are most likely used in the bottom of their bird cages and CDs make lousy drink coasters.

So as I come to the final paragraph of this missive the question is "Is there a point to all this waffle?" Well, like Battlecruiser 3000, not really.

Bob Marchet

So Bob, tell us about your childhood...

Big name game

I'd like to ask a question on a trend that seems to be very common in the games industry seen in your news section. It seems that a lot of people who work for big name game companies (LucasArts, Firaxis, Origin) are leaving (or retiring)

BYTE SIZE

The Sims. A massively multiplayer game. Might make some money...

Nicholas Bebbington

It's a bit obvious, isn't it?

and going out, forming their own little game companies. I could name some examples like Lord British leaving Origin (correct me if I'm wrong), that Romero fellow leaving id (even though that was a long time ago, but still...) and a lot of guys leaving LucasArts last year just to name a few. Just what is this game industry coming to? Aren't people ever satisfied with what they have?

KaOs KongO

The human ego is a major factor in the creative drive in all of us. You shouldn't be concerned about the situation you describe - it's not as if these guys are being lost to the industry. Anyway wasn't it ever thus?

Hurt Me Plenty

I have a number of questions to ask:

1. What is your all time favourite game?
2. How many entries for competitions do you get every month?
3. Is Major Des really a Major from the defence force?
4. How come you rated Delta Force 2 a crap score?
5. Did you guys ever read the book Wheel of Time? I am up to book five: The Fires Of Heaven.
6. How come you did not put a score for Firestorm?
7. Are you angry with GST on games?
8. How come some games come out way before you guys review them? For example, Vampire.
9. How may levels in Quake III you did on Hurt Me Plenty, Hardcore and Nightmare?

Dread Knight

Okay... Deus Ex, lots, yes, 78 isn't crap, fantasy tosh, oops, not yet, our production schedule, and all of them, all of them, most of them.



System Shock 2: shit scary



Server

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Southern Cross Cable Network is readying a 50Mbps fibre ring that will link Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Hawaii, and a direct link will be built between Hawaii and mainland US. The new link will be ready for service on November 15, 2000. Meanwhile Telstra is currently laying a 400Mbps link between Australia, Japan and the US. The link will be completed by the end of 2001. Both pipelines promise to greatly increase bandwidth between Australia and the rest of the world.

www.bigpond.com/advance



www.iinet.com.au



www.transact.com.au



The Cable Rollout

UPDATING THE DELIVERY OF BROADBAND ACROSS THE NATION

to MDUs that currently have Optus Vision cable TV, and other areas where installation is deemed straightforward, no guarantees have been made as to whether installation will take place, even if Optus Vision is already installed.

Around the country

Other areas in the country are relying on alternate providers to supply them with cable access. Perth ISP iinet has announced that it is in the process of cable rollout around Perth after a successful trial. The

company has tentatively said that the service will become available from the end of September. Canberra will finally get cable access from TransACT

Communications. TransACT will be rolling out a network made up of fibre-optics and copper cable that promises 36Mbps connection speed. This is a different kind of network than those already installed by Telstra and Optus, which use hybrid coaxial fibre-optic (HCF) and is currently speed-limited to 10Mbps. TransACT will begin rollout in September.

Analysts have predicted that broadband users may leapfrog cable altogether and jump on the ADSL bandwagon. It remains to be seen, however, whether ADSL can fulfil the requirements of a wide geographic population and whether its rollout will encounter the same problems and delays as cable.

www.optushome.com.au
Optus' cable service is a favourite with certain PowerPlay writers

Cable Internet offers a broadband access solution for the masses that is theoretically easy to install (in terms of infrastructure) due to the use of coaxial 'cable TV' cable and would be available to all. So far the reality hasn't lived up to the promise but cable access is now available in some areas.

Telstra and Optus now offer cable access in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney through their Telstra Bigpond Advance and Optus@Home services respectively. Outside the eastern seaboard, however, cable access is still a pipe dream that has been coming Real Soon Now for over two years. So what's

happening? Not enough for most users craving high-speed connections.

Telstra is planning cable rollout in regional centres of the eastern states (mainly NSW and Victoria) but no dates have been released regarding when the service will come into operation. Telstra has been pushing its satellite option as a cable substitute for other regional and rural areas.

Optus finally addressed one of the major concerns of most potential users - the fact that their service was not available in apartment blocks or multi-dwelling units (MDUs). While they have committed to provide cable access

Napster stays online

DOWNLOAD FREE MUSIC FOR ANOTHER FEW MONTHS

Nine hours before it would have been forced to shut down its music-swapping service, Napster won a temporary reprieve in the form of a stay of injunction. The decision was made with only a few hours to spare on Friday 28th July by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The decision allowed Napster to remain in operation past midnight US Pacific Time Friday night, when a previous court order would have forced the company to halt the sharing of copyrighted music - effectively shutting it down.

In its two-page order, the court said Napster "raised substantial questions (on) both the merits and the form of the injunction." The court also granted Napster's request for an expedited appeal. The company is required to file a legal brief with the court by August 18th; a responding brief by the music industry is due September 8th. After the briefs are filed, the court will schedule oral arguments. The decision does not address the merits of the case.

Rather, it only maintains the status quo until the case receives a full hearing, which is likely to occur around mid October.

Music fans everywhere have come out in defence of Napster and some artists including Limp Bizkit, Radiohead and Billy Corgan (of Smashing Pumpkins) have indicated that their support for the Napster music community. You can find Napster on this month's CD PowerPlay.



PING!

GARAGE SALE
A former executive at Sierra has launched an internet-based games group with the aim of giving young developers a helping hand. Garagegames.com will enable independent game developers to have their first titles published via the web, hopefully alleviating the major hurdle for all first-time designers.

www.garagegames.com

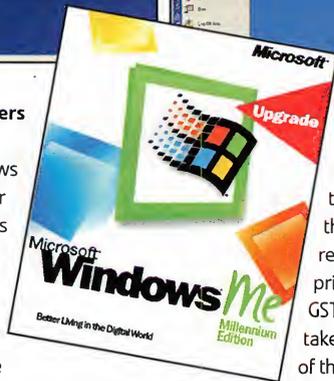


Cheaper Windows

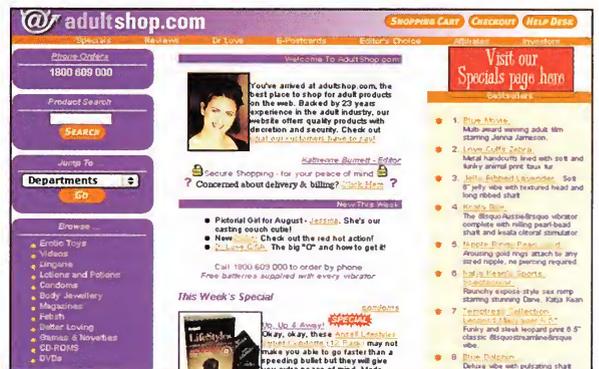
MICROSOFT SWEETENS THE MILLENNIUM DEAL



With some reviewers panning Windows Millennium Edition (Windows Me) due to its high price for what is essentially Windows 98 Third Edition, Microsoft has slashed the cost of upgrades. This follows the announcement in the US that Windows Me would be available for the promotional price of \$59.95. From September 14, the release date of Windows Me, through to January 15, Microsoft will offer a special price of \$109 (including GST) for Windows 98 and Windows 98 SE users upgrading to its new operating system. The new price is well



below its RRP of \$206. This new Australian pricing campaign follows the confusion surrounding the new OS's recommended retail price prior to the introduction of GST. Microsoft had failed to take into account the impact of the new tax, which saw software prices rise by up to 10%. The company has also been criticised for the high upgrade price, given the lack of major new features. Microsoft released Windows Me to manufacturing in June this year. Windows Me is supposedly the final version of Windows to be based on the Windows 95 kernel.



Naughty

ADULT SITE HIT BELOW THE BELT

Cybersquatting is something that most major corporations have had to deal with. None, however, have gained as much attention for similar domain names as AdultShop.com. AdultShop has identified several domains very similar to the AdultShop.com name being used or sold over the Internet. In one instance, the company's CEO, Malcolm Day was even contacted directly by someone wanting to sell a domain similar to AdultShop.com. The company is apparently unperturbed by the practice, and is confident of being able to wrest control of any address similar to AdultShop.com.

One such address brought to Day's attention this week is the adultshopaustralia.com domain, now being offered for sale through domain registry Network Solutions. The address was registered in February this year by the owners of a site called Sensual Shopping, along with several other sex-related domains. Like AdultShop.com, Sensual Shopping is based in Australia and specialises in erotic merchandise. AdultShop.com is no stranger to such cases, having been on the receiving end of a \$1 million offer for the AdultShop.com.au domain in 1999. After a public battle, AdultShop.com finally managed to gain control of the address when its owners failed to re-register the name.



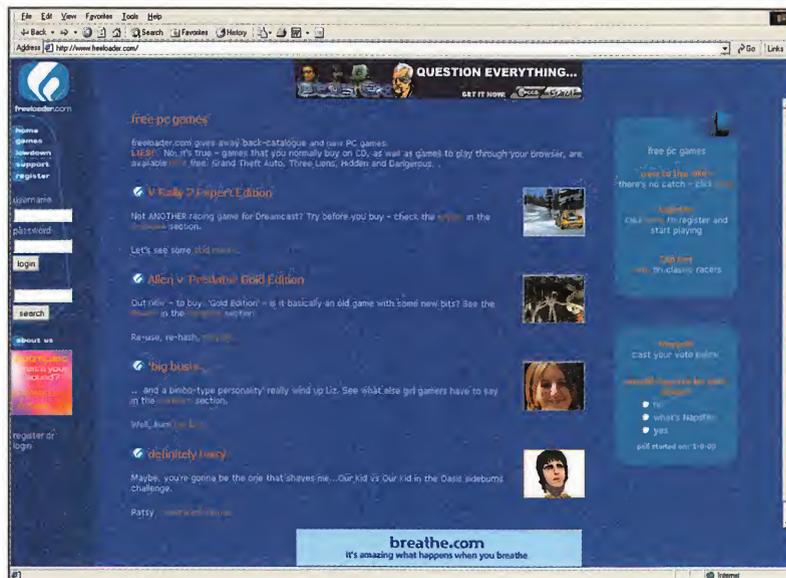
PING!

NOTHING IS NEW

If free games available simply by advertising overload seems like a revolutionary idea to you take a step back and look at that other cathode ray tube you feel so fondly about - your TV. The basic premise is the same - you get to see programs for free because they're crammed down your neck with a glutinous helping of advertising; you get games for free because... you get the idea. But then again isn't that essentially the way the whole of the web works?

Freeloader

GET FULL GAMES OFF THE WEB FOR FREE - AND IT'S LEGAL



answering a set of questions for each individual episode. Once complete the game is not, however, exactly the same as the retail version. Strong warnings on the site inform gamers not to try to patch games downloaded from freeloader with patches released for the retail versions - doing so will corrupt the game and render it unplayable.

Painless

Freeloader has employed many groundbreaking technologies in the formation of its service - so much so that Pure Entertainment has licensed the advertising engine and has many prospective buyers. Freeloader is an excellent new concept and the ability to get games without parting with your cash is very enticing. The games freeloader provides are not on the bleeding edge of the release cycle, however, and games that are set to be record breakers such as Quake 3, Unreal Tournament and Diablo II may never make it to the site. For many other games that you may have balked at because of the hundred bucks or so, freeloader is a relatively painless way to put you in the action.

Freeloader is definitely worth a look but it highlights one of the biggest problems with personal computers - even with broadband the speed of the net can't give you that instant gratification that you're after.

Sebastian Fern

Freeloader.com promises the holy grail for some gamers - the ability to download games legally without it costing you a cent. Most of you will now be thinking 'what's the catch?'

According to freeloader there is no catch, but you always have to take promotional material with a grain of salt. If you're averse to advertising then freeloader will not be the gamer's paradise that you've been hoping for. If, however, you don't mind following numerous banners and answering market research type questions, freeloader.com may just be your gaming Mecca.

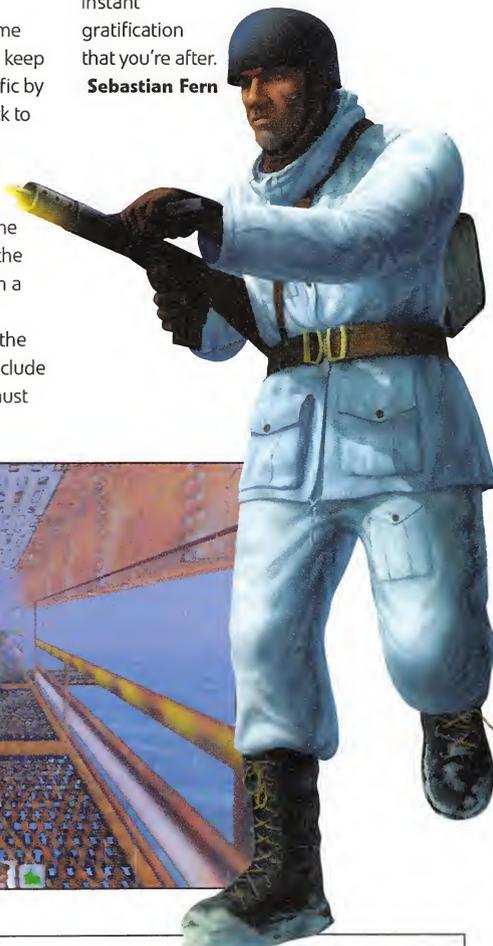
Episodic

Pure Entertainment officially launched freeloader.com on May 31st with over 73,000 pre-registered users. Since then freeloader has received increasing press coverage and site traffic. Essentially the idea behind freeloader is that it provides registered users free games for download - recent games in exchange for points earned

by following banner links to advertisers sites and answering market research questions both during registration and before the download can go ahead. The revenue earned by Pure Entertainment from advertising and selling aggregate details based on users' responses is enough to allow them to provide games freely.

In a shrewd move so as to maximise revenue, freeloader offers the game downloads in 'episodes' so that the game comes out in instalments. This helps to keep a consistently high level of website traffic by encouraging users to keep coming back to complete their game. The episodes are sensibly broken up into levels of the games and once a given episode has been completed the game will exit to the desktop with a message encouraging the user to download the next episode with a link to freeloader.com.

Each episode is a separate piece of the game and a newer episode does not include previous episodes. In this way a user must download each episode of a game



One of the best and most recent additions to freeloader is Hidden & Dangerous





DVD
VIDEO



DOLBY
DIGITAL



MADMAN
ENTERTAINMENT
presents



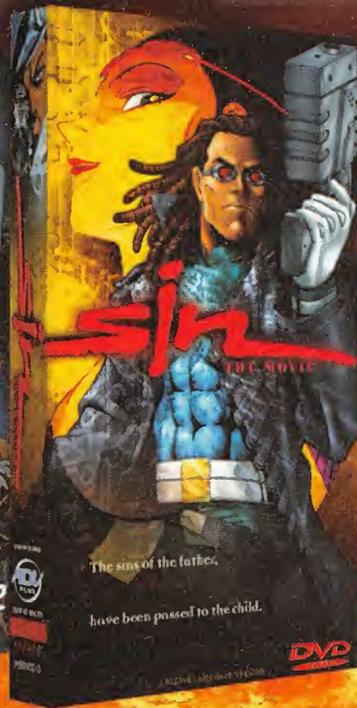
october



out now



october



november



november



october

Manga Video is Back and bringing you the best in glorious DVD action!

Coming Soon: Akira - Castle Of Cagliostro - X - Perfect Blue and many more!

Check www.manga.com.au for details.



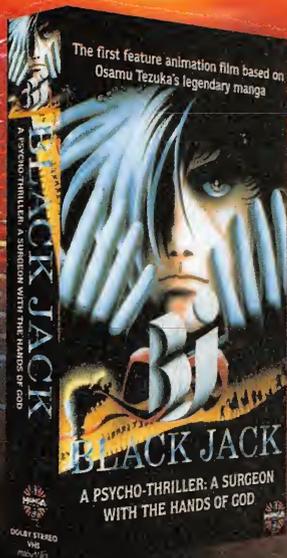
ADV Films continues bringing you the best in Animation - now on DVD!

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and many more to come!



WWW.MADMAN.COM.AU



DRAGONBALL Z



Also available: The Hottest New Animated Titles To Buy On Video





SITE

www.quicksilver.com/moo3
The official site for Quicksilver's Masters of Orion 3 is absolutely exploding with development team interviews and game feature discussions. A designer diary and huge download section make this one of the most comprehensive and entertaining official sites in existence.



MOD

www.strategyplanet.com/homeworld/stvsw/indexns.html
One of the most intriguing works-in-progress ever, the Star Trek vs Star Wars total conversion for Homeworld has the potential to be one of the greatest mods of all time. Though still in the very early stages of development, the incremental release of units over the course of the project makes this one to watch.



Online Shopping

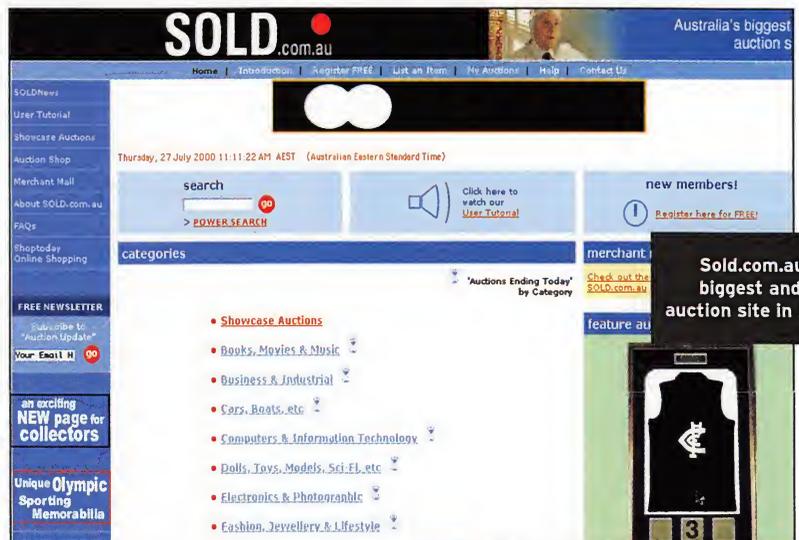
COMFORTABLY ENSCONCED WITHIN A PIMPIN' PENTHOUSE APARTMENT AND PERIODICALLY EMERGING TO CRUISE THE STREETS OF SYDNEY IN HIS BRAND NEW AUDI TT, BRETT ROBINSON MAY HAVE TAKEN HIS COMPANY-FUNDED RESEARCH INTO ONLINE SHOPPING JUST A LITTLE TOO FAR

Over the past twelve months, the Australian e-commerce industry has experienced a surge in consumer interest - particularly in the online auction and e-tailing sectors. Advertising in this domain has become increasingly pervasive, with the mainstream media serving as a vector for multi-million dollar promotions centred around such seemingly irrelevant mascots as a deified, reputedly omniscient, Clown Fish.

But, in light of the market performance of many of these companies, how effective these campaigns have been in raising consumer awareness is somewhat questionable. Companies expected to dominate their respective markets have floundered, while those less promising ventures have flourished to become market leaders. Such is the nature of this volatile industry.

There are several distinct advantages to shopping online. Primary amongst these is convenience - few would deny the attraction of browsing for and ordering goods from the comfort of their own home. It is also markedly easier to find the most competitive prices online than it is to phone countless retailers and wander through shopping centres. Warehouse-based trading, which negates the need for expensive retail floor space, also allows many e-tailers to sell their products at lower prices than those offered by traditional vendors.

On the flip side, there are several disadvantages and risks associated with shopping online. Fortunately, many of these can be circumvented, or at least minimised. In spite of the panic induced by widespread negative media coverage based predominantly on anecdotal evidence, e-commerce transactions remain relatively safe, especially with the advent of high-level encryption protocols. Such is the efficiency and safety of these



Sold.com.au: the biggest and best auction site in Australia

systems that electronic transactions are scarcely more risky than 'real world' monetary transactions. But, as with regular transactions involving cash or the use of credit and savings accounts, care must be taken in ensuring that others do not gain access to personal information and account details.

What should be of greater concern to online shoppers is the fact that purchased items can be damaged in transit, or disappear altogether. DVDs are an especially attractive target for less-than-honest couriers and postal workers. It is for this reason that insurance of valuable packages is recommended.

Auctions

The most popular form of online shopping, auctions are an excellent way of purchasing goods and services at bargain prices. The popularity of US auction site, Ebay, has spawned a host of similar sites within Australia. Of these, Sold.com.au is the most commercially successful site, offering thousands of items in a multitude of categories. These range from mobile phones to antique furniture, sporting memorabilia to vintage wines.

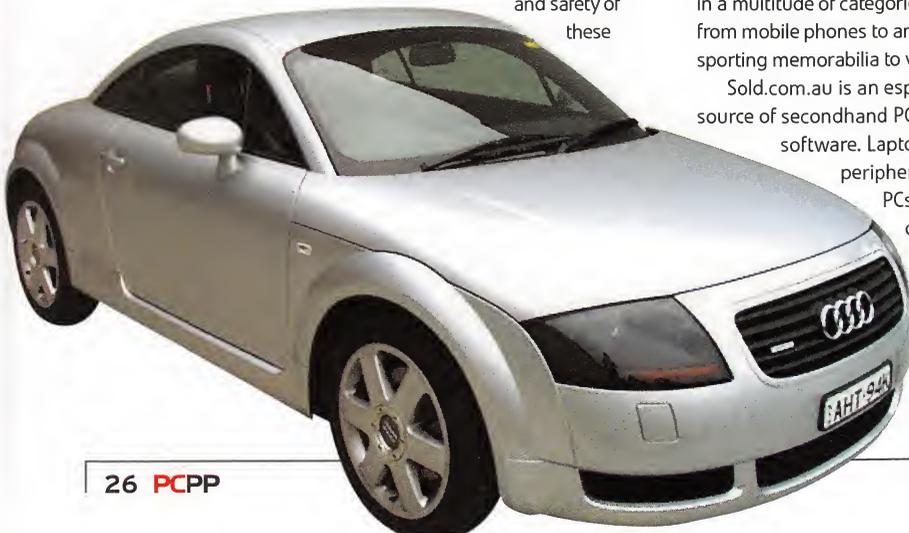
Sold.com.au is an especially attractive source of secondhand PC hardware and software. Laptops, laser printers, peripherals and desktop PCs abound, many only a few months old but offered at a substantial discount. Thousands of PC and console games are also



offered, with the latest titles often selling secondhand for as little as \$65 - excellent if you don't mind the fact that someone else tore the shrink wrap off the box.

However, there are a number of factors to be mindful of when bidding online. Online auctions are the most high-risk form of online shopping in that the potential for disaster is many times greater than if goods are purchased from e-tailers. It is for this reason that buyers are urged to take great care when dealing with online auctions.

Before bidding on any item, it is imperative that the average cost of that item is thoroughly researched. At the very least, find out the recommended retail price from a local store or online retailer, then bid accordingly. Ideally, you should obtain quotes from as many sources as possible, and only bid for as long as the auction item's price remains below the level of the cheapest quote. It is not uncommon for popular products like Palm V's and mobile phones to sell at prices well above the recommended retail price, due wholly to poor research on the part of the bidders. Those foolish enough to become embroiled in bidding wars with other hopefuls may also inadvertently pay a



lot more than they should for an item. Worse still, it may be that their most rabid competitor could simply be the seller bidding under an assumed name - a more common occurrence than one would naturally assume.

The majority of auction sites employ a rating system whereby those who have dealt with particular buyers and sellers can provide positive or negative feedback on them. Before bidding on an item, read any comments on the seller. Are their items of good quality? Do they package their goods in order to protect them from damage during transit? Do their customers make hearty recommendations to buy from them? If there are claims that the seller absconded with a successful bidder's money, sent them an item that differed in appearance, quality

dstore.com.au offers excellent savings on a huge range of products

or quantity from the item described, or simply took too long to conduct a transaction, then dealing with that particular seller is obviously not advisable.

If ever in doubt about the legitimacy of a seller, always trust your intuition. If something about an auction seems suspicious, look elsewhere. It's far better to err on the side of caution than to have some shyster living on the opposite side of the country walk off with your hard-earned dollars or, worse still, have the goods you've purchased impounded by the authorities because they turned out to have been stolen.

Online Department Stores

Though less frequently visited than online auction sites, online department stores are nonetheless quite popular. All offer an impressive selection of products including music CDs, DVDs, household appliances, PC hardware and, of course, games. The ubiquitous dstore.com.au's dynamic marketing campaign has seen its customer base increase dramatically, practically ensuring its success. However, TopShop.com.au has launched an equally aggressive promotional campaign which

may see it forcibly acquire a significant portion of dstore.com.au's market share.

Meanwhile, Estore.com.au continues to languish in obscurity, no doubt due to the limited number of products that it offers, and its virtual absence from the public eye. But, no matter what the outcome of this heated battle, one thing is certain - such intense competition can only result in better value and improved service for Australian consumers.

Groceries

For those with neither the time nor the inclination to leave the confines of their abode in order to stock up on provisions, a number of online grocery stores may be just what they're looking for. These sites offer a wide variety of fresh produce, ranging from fruit and vegetables to fillet steak, home delivered within 24 hours. Orders are shipped in large cardboard boxes, and individual items are wrapped in protective material to prevent crushing and bruising. They're also arranged in an intelligent fashion, meaning that fragile items are placed at the top where they won't be decimated by weightier items. Though slightly more expensive than the average

supermarket, the savings in terms of time and aggravation are well worth it. Of the two online grocery stores operating within the Sydney region, Greengrocer.com.au is highly recommended. Woolworths.com.au's Homeshop is slightly less appealing, thanks to its rather exorbitant \$12.50 service charge and a minimum purchase amount \$10 higher than that of its competitor.

Events

One of the most inspired uses of e-commerce yet. Both Ticketek.com.au and Ticketmaster.com.au offer tickets to sporting events, concerts and hundreds of shows from their sites the instant tickets become available. So while those without internet access are forced to camp out for several days just to get back row seats to see

SITE

www.projectigi.com
Innerloop's official Project IGI (aka I'm Going In) site is regularly updated with new screenshots and video captures of their tactical action shooter. An interview with the game's producer also sheds light on some of the finer details of this interesting game.



MOD

www.ttlg.com/usshock
Monitor the progress of Project Unreal System Shock- a concerted effort by a team of artists and programmers to port the original System Shock to the Unreal Tournament engine. The FAQ lists the team's latest accomplishments, as well as its aspirations and plans for this extremely promising mod.



Ticketek.com.au
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Event Selector: STEP 1 of 3

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Trade, resale, items

REAL TIME PAGE TO A FRIEND

PCPP 27



Etrade provides near instantaneous ASX transactions

ONLINE SHOPPING DIRECTORY

AUCTIONS

- Sold.com.au
- BidorBuy.com.au
- Gofish.com.au
- Ubid.com.au

AUTOMOTIVE

- Eauto.com.au
- Drive.com.au

BOOKSTORES

- Coop-Bookshop.com.au
- Dymocks.com.au
- CollinsBooks.com.au

CLASSIFIEDS

- TradingPost.com.au

HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE

- HT.com.au
- AusPCMarket.com.au

E-TAILERS

- TopShop.com.au
- dstore.com.au
- Estore.com.au

EVENT TICKETS

- Ticketek.com.au
- Ticketmaster.com.au

FOOD

- GreenGrocer.com.au
- Woolworths.com.au

MUSIC

- CentralStationRecords.com
- LeadingEdgeMusic.com.au

RESTAURANTS (DELIVERY)

- CuisineCourier.com.au

SHARES

- Etrade.com.au
- StockRocket.com.au
- E-Shares.com.au

TRAVEL

- Travel.com.au

WINE

- VintageCellars.com.au
- WinePlanet.com.au



OTHER

- AdultShop.com.au

Britney Spears "live" in concert, you can simply log on to these sites at 9am the day that tickets go on sale, and nab front row seats with scarcely a thought for the suckers who endured freezing temperatures and numerous muggings. Then give yourself an uppercup for having such poor taste in music.

Shares

Buying and selling shares online tends to be much cheaper than doing so through a broker. Sites such as Etrade.com.au, StockRocket.com.au and E-Shares.com.au offer brokerage in shares listed on the Australian Stock Exchange (ASX) at extremely competitive rates. Unfortunately, none of the major online brokerage firms within Australia offer electronic trading on overseas markets like the NASDAQ, but this is certain to change in the near future as international trading networks are established.

Bookstores

While it's one of Australia's lesser known book distributors, Coop-Bookshop.com.au is renowned for its fast, efficient service and excellent prices. Delivery typically takes only 7 days, making it one of the speediest online booksellers, and its ability to locate rare and out-of-print editions anywhere in the world is legendary. Dymocks.com.au and CollinsBooks.com.au are equally impressive sources of quality reading material, and the

minimal shipping fees of these three sites make them an attractive, if not more efficient, alternative to scouring the shelves of your local book outlet.

Travel

Although a multitude of online travel agencies exist, few are as comprehensive or efficient as Travel.com.au. From this site, it is possible to book flights to any city in the world, organise accommodation and devise complex itineraries in a matter of minutes. The ultimate in convenience and efficiency.

Tips and caveats

Most, if not all, sites allow users to choose between secure and non-secure servers when conducting electronic transactions. The choice here is obvious: the lesser the chance of any undesirables acquiring sensitive personal and financial information, the better.

Before committing to any online transaction, be sure to familiarise yourself with the site's Returns Policy. Will they refund your money if you're unhappy with the quality or performance of the goods? Will they cover postage in the event of an exchange? If they offer insurance, it is often wise to pay that little bit extra for it - especially if your order is very valuable. You never know when a package will mysteriously disappear.

Although very popular auction sites offer a greater selection of items, it is often possible to get a better deal on some of the smaller sites, purely because of the reduced numbers of potential bidders visiting them.

Q

WHAT IS AUSTRALIA'S BEST MAGAZINE FOR TODAY'S MUSIC MAKERS, FEATURING EVERYTHING FROM LOCAL TO INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS AND PRODUCERS AND ALL THE BEST GEAR, GADGETS, HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE?

nextmusic

THE FUTURE OF MUSIC TECHNOLOGY

A



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WITH FREE CD.

available at all good newsagents



ONLINE

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Visit Cornered Rat Software Studio's temporary home and check out the most comprehensive FAQ section you're ever likely to see.

www.wiionline.com



Vehicle models are extremely detailed, particularly for an online game

World War II Online

THE MOST AMBITIOUS ONLINE GAME WE'VE EVER SEEN IS SEEKING NEW RECRUITS. MAJOR DES MCNICHOLAS WAS FIRST IN LINE...

Single player games will always sell, but there can be no doubt that the future of gaming lies with the online community. Real teams, real opponents and persistent environments all combine to create an artificial world that challenges, excites and immerses players in a way that battling the AI simply can't match.

problems, other issues such as lag times, inadequate servers and excessive cost have all prevented massive multiplayer games from achieving their full potential. Cornered Rat Software Studios intends to tackle these challenges head-on, with the approaching launch of WWII Online.

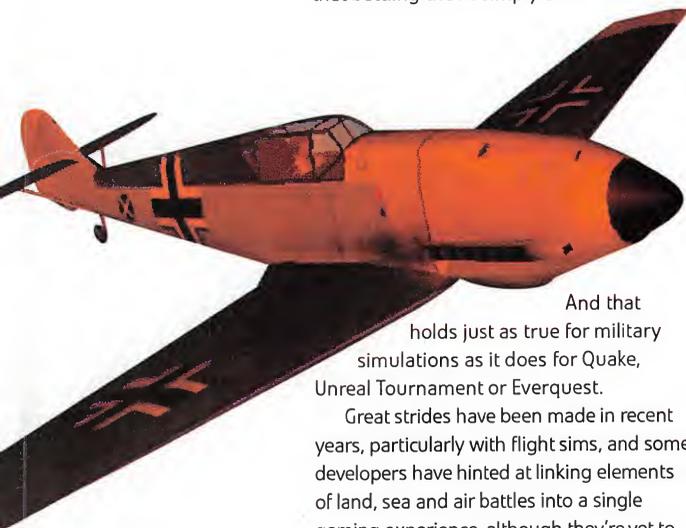
This game is breathtaking in its intended scope, with "ambitious" just not cutting it as a description of what the Rats are trying to achieve. WWII Online will cover the whole gambit of the biggest and most complex war in history, from driving individual aircraft, tanks and ships, to senior command and strategic appointments. Ten arenas, including Europe and the Pacific will be available for players to join, with up to 1000 players online in *each* arena at any one time.

If they could just pull that off at the tactical level then this game would be something to write home to Mum about, but WWII online will also let players advance to the strategic direction of entire campaigns, or the control of nations. Even so, all players will have to start at the bottom, progressing through the ranks as their experience grows, with no opportunities to jump in ahead of the queue.

Dedication to duty

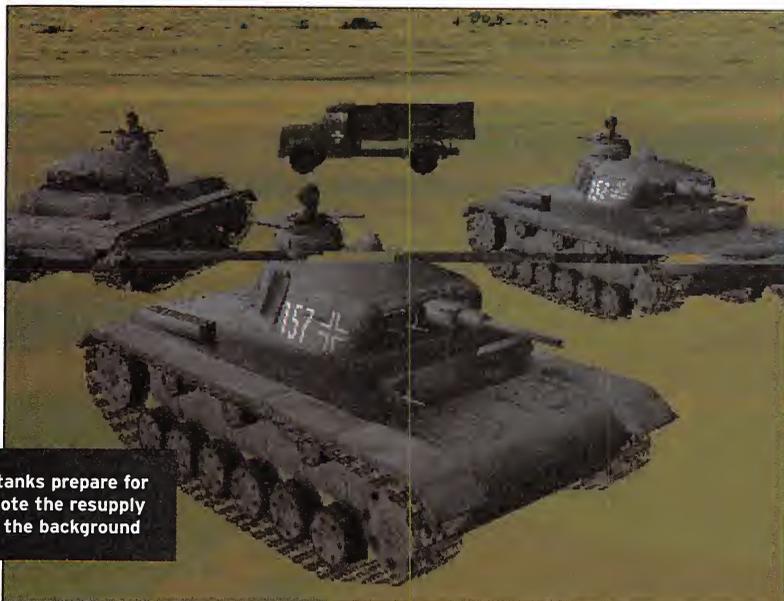
WWII Online will be kicked off with a free download of 50-100 MB and sustained by a flat-rate monthly access fee. Email will be used to post missions, discuss plans, and assign forces, with subordinate commanders having the opportunity to accept or reject missions - if you want to get ahead, then WWII Online will clearly not be a once-a-week pastime. The net result should be a realistic but different experience for each participant, as their own actions may only play a small part in the plans of their country's senior leadership.

A Squadron Leader in the RAF, for example, might provide air support to a US tank battalion as it attacks a German defensive position, without knowing the bigger picture behind the operation. Conversely, as players progress in rank they will establish a working relationship with their online peers, eventually permitting detailed and co-ordinated planning of single battles or major campaigns. And establishing rapport will be important, with promotion to senior appointments requiring the sponsorship of someone who's already at the top of the tree.



And that holds just as true for military simulations as it does for Quake, Unreal Tournament or Everquest.

Great strides have been made in recent years, particularly with flight sims, and some developers have hinted at linking elements of land, sea and air battles into a single gaming experience, although they're yet to deliver. Aside from the obvious software



German tanks prepare for battle. Note the resupply truck in the background



Patience is a virtue when a tank is crossing your path



graphics, sound and situational awareness - all of which must be sent from one end to the other. Optimistically, Cornered Rat aims to provide a trouble-free connection, although the Texas-based server will result in at least some of the usual frustration that goes with being Australian gamers. Redundancy and problem protocols will be the key to achieving quality connections, including triple routing options and automatic ingame switching to better lines.

Senior command will offer a number of benefits, such as the ability to post missions, manage supply, and control surveillance assets, but WWII Online also promises a terrific experience for those of us less likely to join the Red Tab Aristocracy. Virtually every piece of offensive equipment will be available for operation in FPS mode, ranging from the Char B1 Bis tank, to the Spitfire, to individual stations on naval units, while the AI will control many defensive or logistic systems, including bunkers, AA guns, trains and convoys.

Interestingly, players will need to qualify on the equipment off-line before taking it into action as part of a squad or going it alone. Accrued mission points (based on performance not attendance!) will determine promotion prospects, and an overall score (kills etc) will also be maintained by the server. The developers have likened individual play as a soldier in WWII Online to Rogue Spear, and that would be more than good enough for me!

Going rogue

"Rogue" players are the biggest problem in the online community, deriving pleasure from ruining everyone else's or finding ways to work around the spirit of the game. Given the ability for players to progress to the highest levels in WWII Online - with the potential to stuff around hundreds of players - this game

will be a greater target than most for online vultures. The developers are well aware of the problem, and the system will incorporate a number of safety measures, some of which are likely to set new standards for online play.

Examples include residual player images to prevent a quick exit before death (you might log off but your character will hang around long enough to get what's coming!); rank-based access to information to prevent spying; and individual management of senior commanders by WWII Online staff. Add the fact that military gamers are far more likely to be "proper chaps" than your average chainsaw-wielding Quake fanatic, and the result should be a rewarding and challenging experience for all!

If WWII Online is going to work, then players must be able to get on and stay on. Massively multiplayer space sims are one thing (white spots, black background!), but bringing it down to earth adds a whole level of complexity in terms of





SPOONMAN'S LAN DIARY

BLAM - BENDIGO LAN AND MULTIPLAYER

Location: Bendigo
Dates: 9/9/00 - 10/9/00
Players: 50+
Cost: \$10 (\$5 for members)
Web: <http://multi.techsurfer.net>

If you're in Bendigo or around the area it would definitely be worth your while checking out this two day event. Only \$5 for members (\$20 membership fee) is great value.

TALANT

Location: Capalaba Old
Dates: Weekly Friday/Saturday
Players: 24
Cost: \$5 = \$15
Web: <http://talant.qgl.org/frames.shtml>

TaLANT might be small, but they definitely make up for that with the sheer volume of events, sometimes up to seven or eight per month. They occasionally have 2 day events and the cost still never goes over \$15. Another great bonus is that you only have to bring your case and peripherals as monitors are supplied. Complete PC Hiring is also available at competitive pricing.

ADELAIDE LAN PARTY ASSOCIATION

Location: Adelaide
Dates: 7/10/00 - 8/10/00
Players: up to 50
Cost: FREE
Web: [http://www.chariot.net.au/\\$7Estevend/index2.htm](http://www.chariot.net.au/$7Estevend/index2.htm)

The first thing I'm sure you have noticed about this party is that yes, it's free. The only cost involved in coming is that of food, which is supplied at very reasonable prices. It's not as big as some parties at the moment but it is still a great deal for a weekend of LAN. They also have a blistering fast Network.

LAN PARTY RESOURCES:

There are many, many resources available for everyone who wants to go to a LAN Party in Australia, two of the foremost sites are:

www.lanparty.com

This is a world wide site but it contains quite a lot of Australian parties. Add your own party to get some publicity and look there regularly to see what new parties are on in your area.

register.ausgamers.com/

As you would expect this is an Australian only site with info on all of the biggest parties. Registrations for all of them are available in the one place.

For submissions, email spoonman@next.com.au

Web Resources

FOR MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2



Motocross Madness Central certainly does live up to its name

Microsoft surprised everyone with the release of Motocross Madness.

The pure playability and quality of this title was the last thing anyone expected from a game aligned with the empire of Mr Gates - and they didn't stop there! Motocross Madness 2, like its predecessor set the benchmark for the genre, and in what is really just an arcade game, comes all the elements that make a classic title even better than the original.

As with any title that sports a cult following - of which MM2 can certainly boast - comes web sites of all shapes and sizes. And with the added customisability of Motocross Madness 2, the sky's the limit! After a long and arduous search we've found for you the best of the best, all with the ultimate intention of increasing the eye-popping, air-catching, bone-breaking excitement that it Motocross Madness 2.

MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2 CENTRAL www.motocrossmadness2.com

Packed full of MM2 goodness, this is certainly the only stop for any virtual dirt-carving freak. Chances are, if you can think it up, it's here at the Central.

Amongst the superlatives available, Central offers the largest collection of bike skins around. If there's a dirt bike on the planet, then it's virtual equivalent can be found here. Rider skins are also in abundance - from the pros to the garage monkey amateurs who've "done it themselves".

By far, the most impressive addition to "the madness" in its second incarnation is the addition of Armadillo, the Official Motocross Madness 2 track editor/creator. Better yet, it's free, and you can pick it up at the Central for the measly price of a 24Mb download. That's right folks, time to get those cogs of grey matter churning, cause your time is at hand. But heck, if the hard work isn't your thing - and "hard work" is

certainly the phase when it comes to Armadillo - then there's a literal tonne of pre-made tracks available in abundance.

If getting hurt doesn't turn you on, even virtually, then a quick click on the movies link and the doors open to the largest gallery of the sickest replays on earth. It's completely freakish what some of these virtual carvin' maniacs get up to. From pure air gymnastics to tight head to head match-ups, if voyeurism is your thang, the Central's video archives have got what you need.

Last stop is the Central's tutorial section, which provides expert advice on anything you could imagine. Jumping, landing, stunts, skinning and track designs, the over inflated tutes' department has everything you need.

With all of these awesome feature available, and presented in a user-friendly and easily accessible format, Motocross Madness 2 Central is your only stop for everything MM2.

Edward Fox

THE ZONE

mcm2.sports-gaming.com
As always, if it comes from the big "M" - and I don't mean McDonalds - it's supported here. After spending all those hours at the Central beeing up your copy of MM2 to be the dirt splattering ultimate, it comes time to test your metal online. Here at Microsoft's Gaming Zone is the online, human challenge to make the game complete! Enjoy, enjoy.



Star Trek ConQuest Online

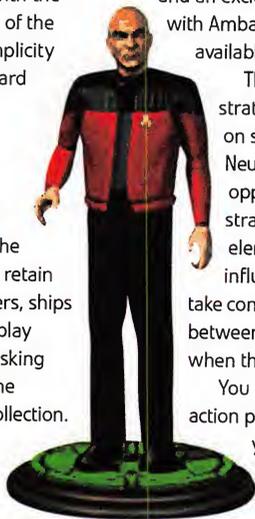
TOO OLD FOR POKEMON? WE'LL SWAP YOU OUR KIRK FOR YOUR JANEWAY

As internet use becomes more commonplace and people get comfortable with using their credit cards online, the way is opened up for more varied and creative ways for companies to sell their wares. Up until now, most game companies have simply followed the normal formula, with the occasional attempt to capture the gamer's precious coin past the initial purchase price, with subscription games like Everquest being the prime example.

Star Trek: ConQuest Online is trying to revolutionise the market. Activision has attempted to merge an extremely profitable real-world market with the ever-burgeoning virtual world of the internet, by combining the simplicity and addictiveness of trading card games with the world wide accessibility of finding other players over the internet.

ConQuest bases its main selling point on the "Collectible Bits" technology in the guts of the program that allows gamers to retain "ownership" of various characters, ships and items. The idea is that you play games against other humans risking the loss of your characters for the chance to obtain part of their collection.

You can purchase more pieces in starter and booster packs much like the card



games. In fact, the entire game is freely downloadable from Activision's site barring tradeable pieces, with the commercial, off the shelf version coming with a starter pack and an exclusive character (our copy came with Ambassador Spock) that is not available for purchase on the net.

The game itself is quite simple - strategically place your characters on ships and slowly take over the Neutral Zone followed by your opponent's home planet. The strategy involves two main elements, characters with influence points who are used to take control of a planet, and combat between ships or between people when they are on planets.

You only have a certain number of action points per turn, which restricts you from launching an all-out attack. Rather, the game is a bit slower paced with you

needing to balance deployment of new pieces on to the game board with movement and other actions for the other pieces already in the game.

The planets in the Neutral Zone have different effects that can affect how you conquer them. For example, a planet with a Peace Zone stops all combat from taking place. Instead, you need to use political influence alone to win it to your side. Other planets may have a Socialist Society which refuses the presence of all unique pieces.

It's hard to tell whether ConQuest will be successful or not. The odd coupling of the more adult-oriented Star Trek theme with the more traditionally younger audience that indulges in trading card games makes us wonder if the concept will really work. The prospect of having to continually pay for pieces and fritter them away in small-scale battles may make some steer clear away.

Andrew Parsons

ONLINE

[www.conquestonline.com/
community/default.html](http://www.conquestonline.com/community/default.html)

Where you can find the latest rankings and the various factions that you can join.



NGN Poll

Send responses to ngn@pcpowerplay.com.au with "NGN Poll" in the subject line. The results of this month's poll to be published in PCPP#55.

In PCPP#50 we asked "Have you or would you like to play a game that supports realtime voice communication? If so, how does it add to the gaming experience?"

In a nutshell, the response was overwhelmingly positive, both from those who had and those who had not experienced it. Here's a sample:

I am super-keen on getting realtime voice communication in games, and not just because my voice is dead sexy. In an game involving fastpaced action/strategy voice communication would allow faster more accurate and more noticeable messaging, thus making cooperation easier. Furthermore you'd no longer have to stop in a nice corner to type out your message. Even at 60+ wpm it takes a couple of secs to type a decent brag. The only problems would be if your voice always went live (some people don't like to swear as much as me), or if someone else had a god

awful voice. Hmm... It would also amplify the wanker factor. You know... The whiney loser who spends half the game needlessly swearing, insulting or complaining, and feels the need to type it all out. Damn it though, the good outweighs the bad.

Beast

The option of realtime voice communication does make the game sound very specky indeed but really you never know what some people say to their computer. Wouldn't you hate playing with a guy that's just swearing his head off the whole time. Now I bet there will be a couple of those guys around but if you find some serious players i'm sure this voice option will come in bloody handy. You won't have to lose your concentration on the game whilst typing in the words, just say whatever you want and the'll hear you. As easy as that. It will certainly make a big impact on how the game is played. TF2 will rule!

James Hilton

I'm currently in the Elite Assassins Core, the current top Counterstrike clan in Australia. Many members of the clan, as well as others in the community, use voice communication when we play on a public servers. The team tactics that we use with our voice communication is very helpful when it comes up to backing up your mate in a battle. Communication is the key in Clan Wars and between the members, as this adds to the gaming experience by making you feel like you are either taking or giving orders to other teammates. The gameplay completely changes when you include realtime voice communication in a game!

Julius Garofali

BOXOUT

Maxis hasn't confirmed it yet, but all indications are that an online version of The Sims is in the works.

So, this month we ask:

Does The Sims Online appeal to you? What features would you like to see Maxis include?



Empire Earth

RECENTLY, REALTIME STRATEGY HAS WITNESSED A CHANGING OF THE GUARD. THE EPIC, EMPIRE-BUILDING GAME HAS BEEN SWEEPED AWAY BY A FOCUS ON INTIMATE, TACTICAL COMBAT. BUT STAINLESS STEEL STUDIOS - HELMED BY THE LEAD DESIGNER OF AGE OF EMPIRES - IS ABOUT TO STAGE A RETALIATORY STRIKE. DAVID WILDGOOSE IS YOUR WAR CORRESPONDENT.

Timeline



From Civilization through to Age of Empires II, the strategy genre had long favoured totalitarian rule on a grand scale. In such games the player always assumed the role of a hereditary monarch whose power was as broad as his dynasty was endless. The games' timelines often spanned centuries, if not millennia, and occasionally seemed to take nearly as long to play.

However, a recent revolution has seen the reigning king deposed and, through titles such as Ground Control, Earth 2150 and Homeworld, control placed in the capable hands of tactically adept field generals. These games are all about the moment, about crucial victories in the here and now. The emphasis has shifted from long term visionaries to short term opportunists.

Stainless Steel Studios' *Rick Goodman* is clearly a man who studied at the old school of war. When work on his previous project - while at Ensemble Studios, he was one of a trio of designers on the original Age of Empires - drew to a critically and commercially successful conclusion, Goodman spent some time evaluating exactly what he could do for a follow-up.

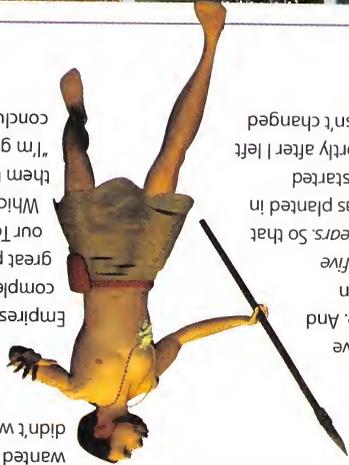
The vision thing

I thought it would be even bigger, even better, would not have four Ages but twelve. And it would cover not ten thousand years but five hundred thousand years. So that was the seed that was planted in my head, which we started development on shortly after I left Ensemble. And it hasn't changed

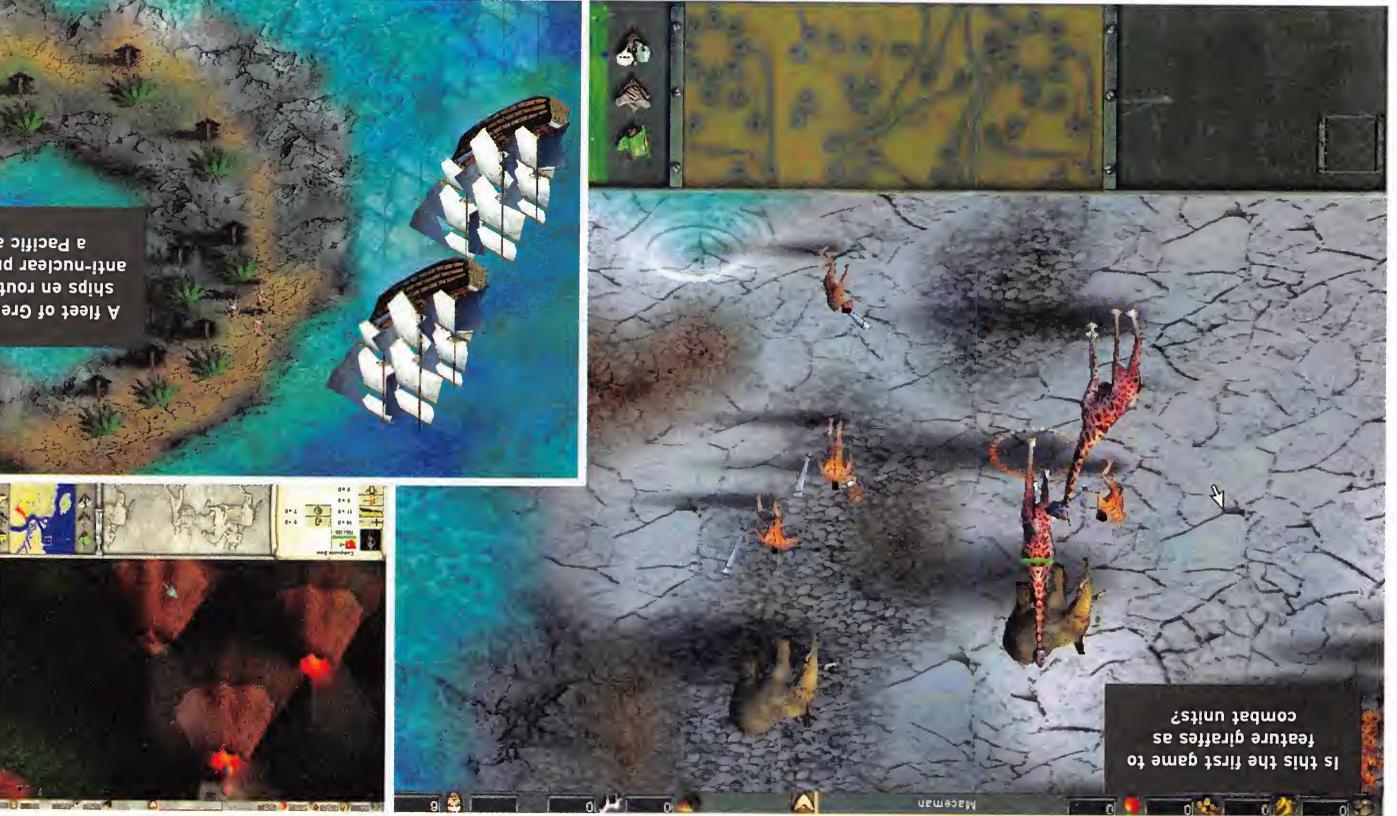
"Empire Earth was born before I finished Age of Empires," he recalls. "As that project was winding down, I was wondering to myself what we'd do for an encore. It was a hard thing to grapple with. One day it occurred to me that the game that I thought would be even bigger, even better, would not have four Ages but twelve. And it would cover not ten thousand years but five hundred thousand years. So that was the seed that was planted in my head, which we started development on shortly after I left Ensemble. And it hasn't changed

much - that initial vision is pretty much where we are today."

It was Goodman's vision that finally persuaded him to leave Ensemble, despite the success he found there. His departure was not acrimonious, though, but rather stemmed from a desire on his behalf to tackle a far more ambitious project. Since then this vision thing has proceeded to guide Empire Earth through two-thirds of its anticipated three-year development schedule. "It's a big project, and that's why I had to do it on my own," Goodman reveals. "It was too big a project for my former company. They wanted to ship a product in a year and I didn't want to be involved in that. I wanted to ship a great product no matter how long it took." In the end, of course, Age of Empires II did take two years to complete and ultimately shipped as a great product, as its third placing in our Top 100 last month testifies. Which is exactly what Goodman told them to begin with, though he adds, "I'm glad they came to that conclusion on their own."



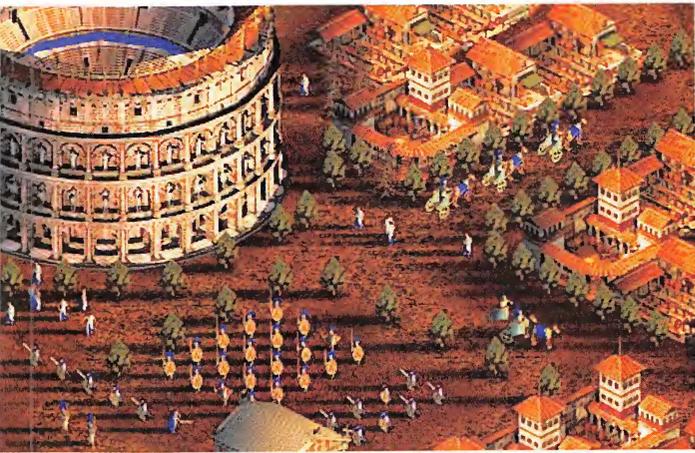
everything that makes war fun



A fleet of Greenpeace ships en route to an anti-nuclear protest at a Pacific atoll

Is this the first game to feature giraffes as combat units?

DETAILS	
GENRE	Realtime Strategy
MULTIPLAYER	Yes
DEVELOPER	Stainless Steel Studios
PUBLISHER	Sierra
DISTRIBUTOR	Jack of All Games
AVAILABLE	2001
URL	www.stainlesssteelstudios.com



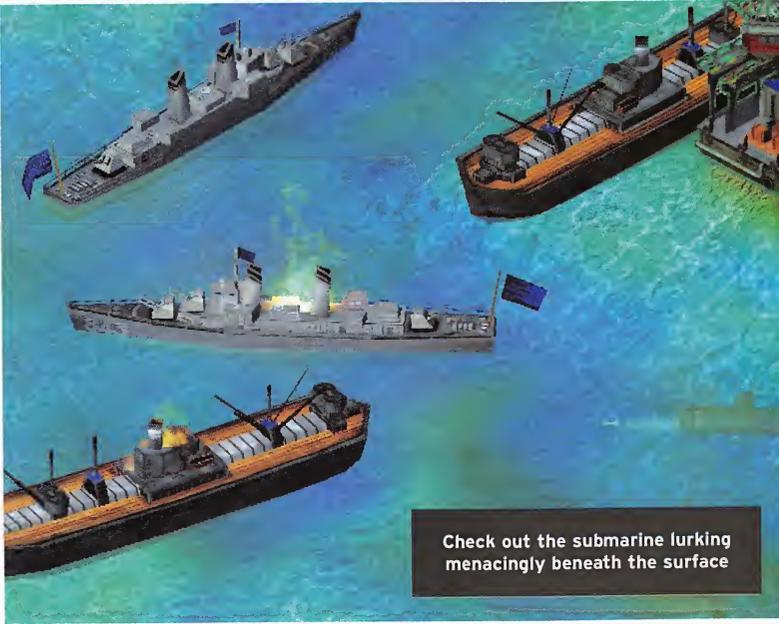
LEAVING EARTH BEHIND

With *Empire Earth*, it seems that developer Stainless Steel Studios is seeking to create the broadest and most all-encompassing strategy title yet. Inevitably, this raises the question of where can they go next? Here is what Lead Designer Rick Goodman had to say about all of the possibilities for the future:

"It's hard to come up with ideas that go further than this, but the territory is so fertile because the universe is a big patch of land to work within. So I think the next step is going to be a challenge, but there are some pretty cool ideas that we're working with now."

"Part of it might be producing a slightly different kind of game. We have experimented with changing the camera angle, and zooming and rotating. Maybe we could do something that puts you on the deck of that aircraft carrier rather than above it. Obviously there are a lot of gameplay issues there, but those are possibilities."

"There are some other options that I like, maybe something involving interplanetary warfare which we do not cover with *Empire Earth*. I could see a game where you start off in the stone age and you work your way up to the future where you go off-planet to fight other players who have also evolved through that period of time. Now that's big."



Check out the submarine lurking menacingly beneath the surface



Realtime renaissance

Looking at the popular strategy games over the past ten years, they all tend to isolate one particular period in time - whether it be past, present or future - and stick to it. In realtime strategy games, especially - with the exception of *Age of Empires* - the concept of the passing of time, with no small degree of irony, barely even registers. By contrast, *Empire Earth* is a strategy game set in realtime on an unprecedented scale. Put simply, it completely redefines all previous notions of what epic - that most overused of terms - actually means. *Civilization II* may have described an arc of time that bridged six millennia, but even that is utterly dwarfed by *Empire Earth's* sheer, breathtaking size.

It should be noted that for Goodman this isn't simply a case of 'bigger is better'. From the outset, Stainless Steel wanted to create a game that embraced the range of time

periods they believed gamers were interested in. And, in doing so, provide them with the scope to create gameplay that is both rich and diverse. "There are people who are interested in science fiction who aren't necessarily interested in history," says Goodman. "But to me it is all history - some of it just hasn't happened yet."

Commencing in the Paleolithic Age, the game moves through twelve so-called Epochs, each one introducing a range of new units, structures, opponents and resources, before finally arriving several hundred years into the future. En route to the Nano Age circa 2200AD, players will take

a tour of duty through the primitive battlefields of ancient and medieval history, engage opponents on the high seas during the Renaissance era, utilise modern 20th century war technology and command laser-toting mechs of the future. In other words, it's got everything that makes war so much fun.

But there are some who might argue that taking on too much can lead to all sorts of problems in the design of the game. Here, Stainless Steel has realised that ambition must necessarily be tempered by practicality. "We recognise the challenge," begins Goodman, attempting to allay those fears. "We have people whose only job at the company is to balance units.

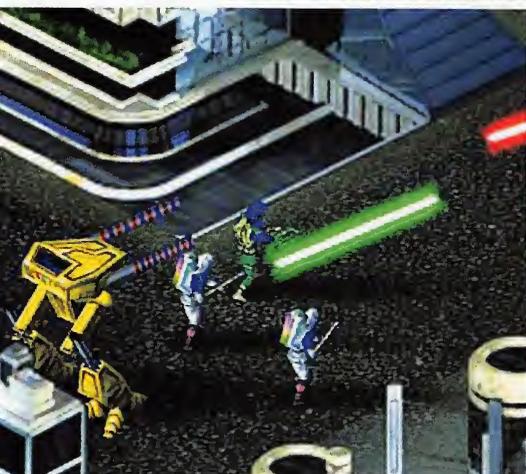
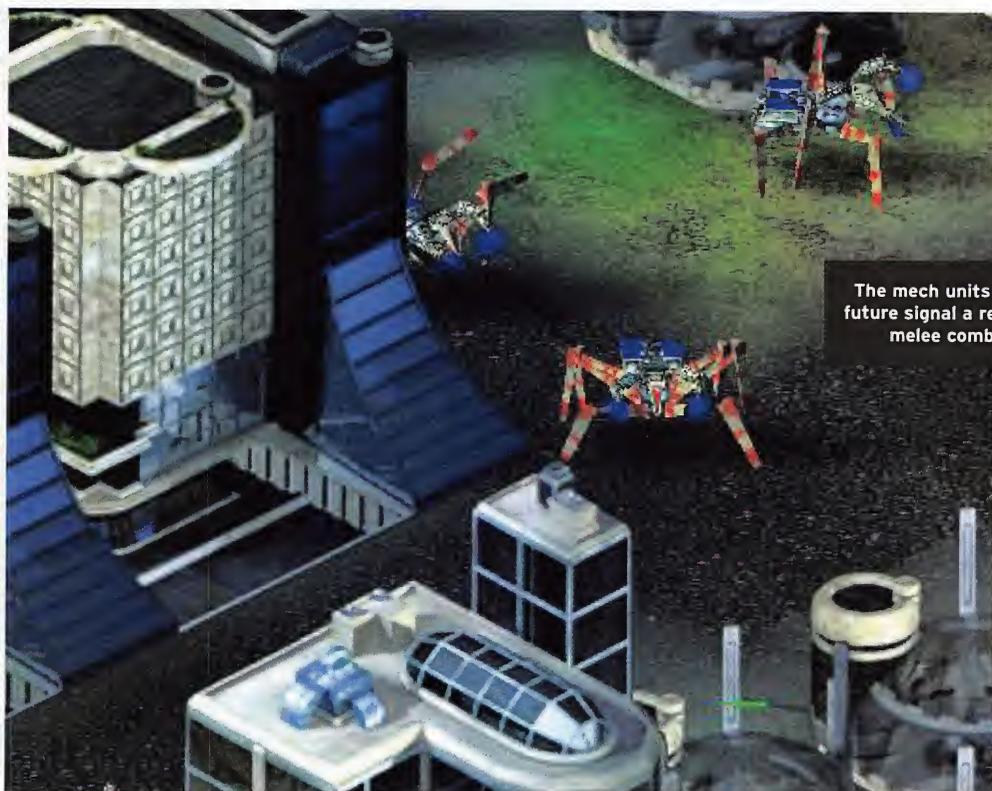
"We also have a good gameplan. It's something that I've thought about for a long time. I put together the framework for play balancing then we added units to the framework. This means the framework doesn't change at all based on the number of units we put in, so we can be very responsive to change.

One unit we added recently was the nuclear submarine: it had a place in the framework that already set aside how it



Timeline





would be balanced against other units. We've been very careful and meticulous about how the process works or it will all get out of control."

As with all good games, the framework relies on but a few basic elements: six resources, six general weapon types and six corresponding armour types. It's when the player begins to combine these elements, and the extent of their various permutations and possibilities is explored, that the game's true depth is revealed.

One clever dynamic concerns the weapons. During the early epochs, melee weapons such as spears and clubs are dominant. As technology progresses and more advanced weapons are researched, ranged attacks come to the fore in the shape of catapults, cannons, and eventually missiles. In the latter epochs, however, hand-to-hand combat makes a return thanks to robots and nanotechnology. Flying units, once introduced in the early 20th century, also bring a whole new angle to tactics on the battlefield. Aircraft have limited fuel supplies, meaning they must constantly return to base to refuel; they vary, too, with some better equipped for long flights, bombing runs or escort missions. Throughout the game it's up to player to keep adapting to these shifts in emphasis.

flying units bring a whole new angle of tactics

Achieving a balance

Even though it's true that the history of war is the history of the world, there is still much more to Empire Earth than combat. At heart it remains an empire-building game where resource management, diplomacy and the economy play as great a role as the military.

Indeed, one path to victory involves religion, a factor whose under-utilisation in many strategy games belies its undoubted immense historical importance. If the player is able to develop his priests then he can use their power to cause calamities. And if these have a sufficient impact upon the enemy then it enables the player to construct one of the game's twelve Wonders - a key milestone on the way to victory.

"I like to think of Empire Earth as a balance between empire-building and combat," Goodman explains. "There are technology trees and resource gathering and economics, all of which are very important to me. You see that in fewer and fewer strategy games, as many of them are being geared toward getting into combat quickly. You'll see many games today that are action-oriented - they have fully

rotatable cameras and a lot of polygons on their characters so you can zoom right in. That's not us. Think of us as more of that grand Civilization style game, but in realtime.

"I would be lying to you if I said any realtime strategy game could approach the depth of a turn-based game. But what I think is honest is that our game is attempting to make the player have the same wonderful experience they had in games like Civ. And it takes a different kind of game to do that. You can't pick up something that worked in a turn-based game and use it here in realtime - the mechanics are completely different. But if you had fun playing Civ then we hope you'll have just as much fun playing Empire Earth."

If Goodman is right, then Empire Earth may well mark the transition point between the turn-based era and the new epoch where strategy games are played exclusively in realtime. The king is dead. Long live the king. ■



Timeline



Arcanum

OF STEAMWORKS AND MAGICK OBSCURA

IS ROLEPLAYING BETTER WITH WIZARDS AND DWARVES OR WITH GUNS AND TECHNOLOGY? IN ARCANUM, IT'S A MOOT POINT.

RYAN HOVINGH ASKS TROIKA ABOUT THE GAME THAT WILL PLEASE FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION FANS ALIKE.



In a world which favours technology, arcane rituals are proscribed



Fantasy role-playing games have generally been trapped in time. The apocalypse may be continually 'just around the corner' but - let's face it - the future never quite comes. These times, however, are now at an end. The original Fallout development team has managed to 'evolve' the traditional fantasy universe and bring it into the industrial revolution where magic struggles against the great machine of technology in Arcanum: Of Steamworks and Magick Obscura.

Any roleplaying fan will already be drooling at the mention of Fallout, a game famous for its amazing combat system, realistic NPC interaction and flexible storyline. Three of Fallout's development team left Black Isle and began Troika Games in April 1998. Although Arcanum will be the team's first release, its innovative twist to the traditional fantasy universe is likely to challenge even the current RPG favourites - Diablo II and Baldur's Gate II.

No character to speak of...

To prevent Arcanum from becoming 'just another RPG', Troika has tried to steer away from the usual number crunching. "While we are all into the hardcore RPGs," explains **Leonard Boyarsky**, co-founder of Troika Games, "we want people to realise that we are into the roleplaying experience and not exercises in statistics management." To this end, the Troika team has removed the traditional character class so players can create a unique personality.

Instead the focus of the character will be on race, skills and traits. All the usual

RPG races will be there - humans, elves, half-elves, dwarves, gnomes, half-orcs, half-ogres and halflings. Not all sexes, however, will be available. "Well, there's that whole thing about whether female dwarves have beards. I don't know where that came from. In Arcanum you'll never see a female dwarf. It's an art and space consideration," admits Boyarsky, by way of justification. "Don't ask a dwarf about it though - he will get rather pissed off."

While character classes have been removed, the basic backbone of the RPG remains - character statistics will still have to be rolled. If Arcanum is anything like Fallout, stats like Charisma and Beauty will still make a big difference.

All quests can be completed using them, not just Strength and Constitution. "Instead of slashing your way through the story, you can just talk to people," says Boyarsky. "I could be a diplomat and convince people that they don't need me to do their quest and that it would be better for them to simply give me what I need up front. That's what Charisma is good for."

As with character statistics, players can get through the game using a variety of skills in different ways too. There's a main story arc that always leads to one point - the differences are in how you decide to get there. If you're a thief, for example, then you will have to steal to get what you need to further the story. If you're into combat then you'll find people to fight. Troika even claims that a player can even kill everybody in the main story arc and still finish the game! What's more, the storyline has hundreds of side quests to improve the roleplaying experience.



Powerful spells will fatigue wizards, making their use somewhat risky

Magicks and Mechanics

The biggest story by far concerns the dichotomy between magic and technology in an industrial fantasy world - the two don't mix. Magic represents control over the physical world while technology represents the world's manipulation. "The decision to specialise (or not) in either category has important implications throughout Arcanum," Boyarsky reveals. "We have included a Magic/Tech Aptitude meter so you can choose where your character fits in the great scheme of things."

Its importance is enormous. A technologist has a slight immunity to spells but can use guns and the like really well. Similarly, guns may misfire in the hands of a magician but their spells are much more powerful. Signs all around Arcanum say 'No Mages Allowed' as the presence of such magicians might disrupt local technological activities.

Magicians use abilities very similar to their Dark Age counterparts. Spells can be bought with skill points accrued during play or the points can be spent upgrading other character attributes - the choice is yours. What makes

DETAILS

GENRE
Roleplaying

MULTIPLAYER
Yes

DEVELOPER
Troika Games

PUBLISHER
Sierra Studios

DISTRIBUTOR
Havas Interactive

DUE
November

URL
www.sierrastudios.com/games/arcanum



The day/night cycle as witnessed here will have a tangible effect on the gameplay



Arcanum's atmospheric architecture combines technology with aesthetics

magic interesting is its use of Fatigue. The spells use a lot of energy that can tire a magician very quickly, especially in combat. Some magicians pass out with exhaustion! Fatigue also determines how long a character can stay in combat, how long he/she can run and more. A magician with low Fatigue, for example, can easily be caught by a blood-hungry enemy fighter.

Technology is, of course, the ability to use and make cool gizmos. While some of the items may sound weird, much of them are real! Boyarsky explains how Troika research many of these items: "We have this serious 1902 catalogue that we took a lot of things from. It had rings that were charged with electricity, which were apparently great for healing you. There was a jacket that gave

you electric shocks to supposedly improve your virility. These things existed - in our game we pretend that they worked."

Technological degrees are attained in a manner similar to magic. Skill points are expended to learn new inventions. "You have all these schematics that you can't use until you raise your technical skills. Once you do they enable you to build things like a dog-sized mechanical spider that will attack whoever is attacking you. You can also build a decoy to put on the ground to draw attention away from you."

Playing with others

As Arcanum includes a highly detailed universe to romp around in, it also provides a great forum for multiplay. Troika is particularly excited about the multiplayer side of the game, as Boyarsky enthuses: "The world doesn't revolve around the story. We created a world we thought would be very interesting to play in to make a rich multiplayer experience. There are dungeons to explore and big cities where you might have to resolve a labour dispute. You won't, however, be able to play the single-player

story in multiplayer because of its complexity - it would take us an extra five years just for play balancing! Other stories and quests will be included though.

"You don't have to be competing, you could cooperate and join with people to form parties," he continues. "If you make a party then it shares accrued experience points between other nearby party members. Otherwise, you can play a deathmatch-style game. I could lie in wait for a guy to show up on a particular quest and then jump on him, like an assassin. We're not putting on any restrictions. Just like our single-player game we're trying to make it open-ended."

Arcanum is based around the roleplaying experience for both single and multiplayer games. The whole magic/technology dichotomy simply breathes innovation, as does its industrial fantasy world setting. With its Fallout heritage, Arcanum is sure to be a hit and possibly revolutionise the RPG genre. Of course, we're all going to have to start reading Jules Verne and HG Wells just to get used to the 1800s language! ■

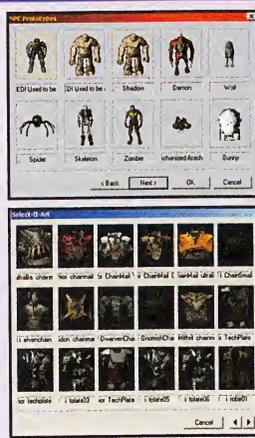
THE MAP EDITOR

While Arcanum is already being touted as a game of infinite variation, Troika has also chosen to incorporate a map editor into the game so people can create their own quests, maps and everything for multiplayer. Apparently, it is the same one used to create the game in the first place.

Over 770 objects and over 300 items have been included in the editor, along with monsters with pre-built personalities - all of which can be edited drag-and-drop style. In addition, monsters can be grouped into factions so they can all respond to an attack as one unit.

Quests are supposed to be easy to create as well. "They're just text files that you can make in programs like Microsoft Word or Notepad," says Troika's Leonard Boyarsky. "When you're designing and you see something that doesn't look right, you can simply quit out of the game and edit the text file." The maps can be created using pre-generated terrain types and touched up with extra finishing touches such as light glows, which look fantastic when a light object is dropped on it. These can, of course, be configured to turn on and off with the rise and set of the sun each day.

With the map editor being included in the game, the potential for multiplay is simply phenomenal. We'll just have to see...



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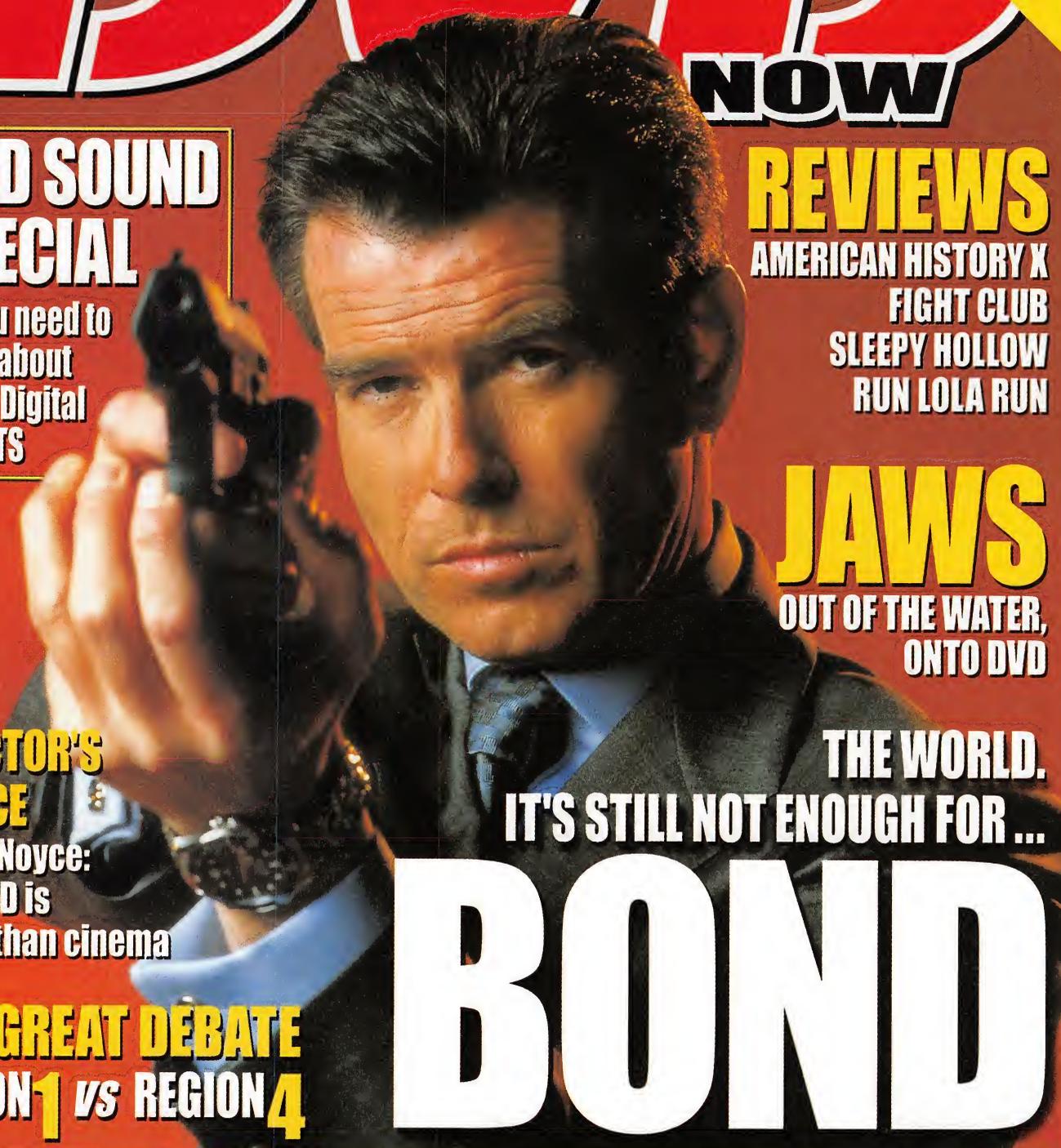
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In Cold Blood

DAVID WILDGOOSE IS ON HAND TO USHER IN THE RETURN OF THE INTERACTIVE MOVIE.



At the risk of causing the entire PCPP readership to flee from this page in terror, I'd like to mention the term "interactive movie". Ever since the early 1990s and the tragic likes of *Phantasmagoria*, *Voyeur* and *Wing Commander IV*, the interactive movie has long been associated with the seedier side of the games industry.

But it need not always be the case. Perhaps in cramming loads of footage of dodgy actors into games, we've been borrowing the wrong elements from films. Indeed, there's no perhaps about it: FMV is inherently non-interactive. However, if inspiration is taken from the right places - in the pacing of a film, its script and cinematography - the interactive movie surely still has plenty to offer the videogame industry.

Flashbacks

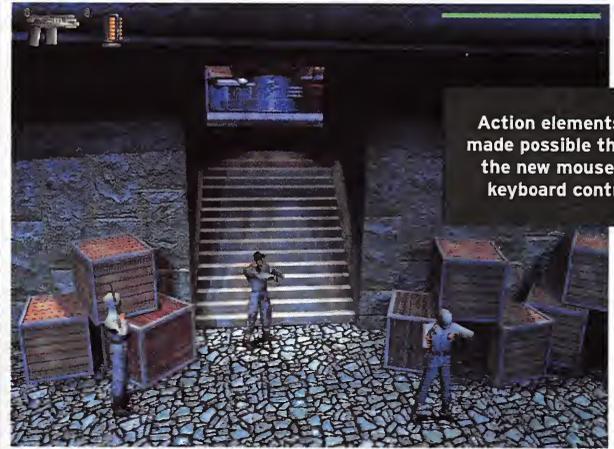
The head of UK-based developer Revolution Software, *Charles Cecil* believes there are plenty of lessons game makers can observe from the films of today. "When I first had the idea for *In Cold Blood*, I'd been watching some amazing films. I remember going to the cinema three weekends in a row and watching *Pulp Fiction* and *The Usual Suspects* and *the City of Lost Children*. It was extraordinary. I was thinking, Jesus, what's going on?"

"Part of the reason that these film makers employed a very dynamic narrative is because today's audience demands that you get into the story really quickly. They aren't prepared to wait ten minutes for the insight or incident that draws you into the film. I think games players are pretty much the same."

With *In Cold Blood*, Cecil decided to begin the game two thirds of the way through the narrative. The opening scene sees hero John Cord's head being yanked out of a barrel of water by his brutal interrogator. From this startling debut, he proceeds to be questioned about his involvement in a very delicate political situation. The scene thus set, the first mission begins.

A particularly clever aspect of the narrative is the manner in which the missions are structured. As Cord's interrogation continues, he gradually recalls the events leading to his betrayal and eventual capture. The missions are played out in his mind, so that when he dies the game simply returns to the interrogation scene and Cord mutters, "No, it can't have happened that way."

But this doesn't sound much like a point-and-click adventure game, which given



Action elements are made possible through the new mouse and keyboard controls



Revolution's history - its lineage includes the Broken Sword series, as well as earlier titles Beneath A Steel Sky and Lure of the Tempress - is what might reasonably be expected. In fact, Cecil cites *In Cold Blood* as a deliberate attempt to advance the genre.

"My feeling is that point-and-click adventures were great ten years ago," he argues, "but the technology has driven forward and that gameplay has become outdated. As technology has advanced, new opportunities have become available. With *In Cold Blood*, we felt it was necessary to drive the adventure genre forward, and that's what we've attempted to do. I'd like to think of it more as a narrative game."

To achieve this aim, a direct control method using the keyboard was chosen because it's more immediate and immersive than the old mouse-driven point-and-click model. Revolution asserts that this allows them to adopt the main strength of a firstperson game - in which you *are* the main character - while retaining the typical thirdperson view of an adventure game - in which you *empathise* with main character.

Player feedback

Not only that, but the new control mechanism has granted a good deal more freedom in the design of the game. Adventure gameplay is no longer limited to a series of object/inventory puzzles. Instead, the option is there for the player to take a gung-ho approach to a situation in addition to a more cerebral course of action. "We felt it was important to offer a variety of gameplay," explains Cecil. "So *In Cold Blood* has fewer puzzles than you might expect in

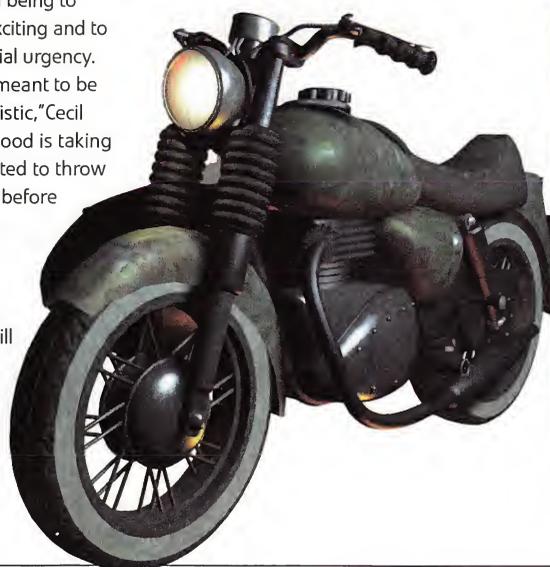
an adventure, but it has the action side which adds a considerable amount to the gameplay. In that sense you can really play the game as you want."

While Revolution claims to have been somewhat influenced by games like *Metal Gear Solid* that have blurred the lines between action and adventure, it was player feedback for one of their own titles that prompted the longest pause for thought. A lot of players really enjoyed a sequence in *Broken Sword 2* where the protagonist Nico must sneak aboard a barge. To do so the player must time her movements so as to avoid detection by the thugs guarding the vessel.

What this added to that earlier game - and what the team has strived to enhance with *In Cold Blood* - is an atmosphere in which the character, and thus, the player feels threatened. The intention being to make the game world more exciting and to inject the narrative with a crucial urgency.

"The games we write are meant to be gritty, contemporary and realistic," Cecil outlines. "And really *In Cold Blood* is taking that one step further. We wanted to throw out everything that had gone before and just write a really strong narrative game. That was our ambition."

Let's hope that ambition is fulfilled. Perhaps Revolution will be the one to drag the interactive movie up from the bottom of the barrel, with its dark-adapted eyes blinking in the unaccustomed light like those of John Cord. ■



DETAILS

GENRE

Adventure

MULTIPLAYER

No

DEVELOPER

Revolution Software

PUBLISHER

Ubisoft

DISTRIBUTOR

Ubisoft

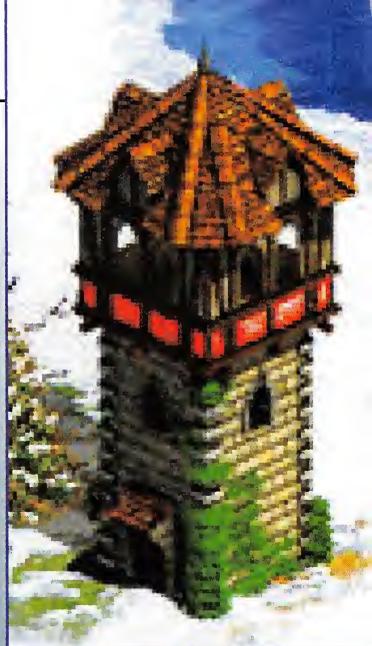
DUE

October

URL

www.revolution.co.uk

AGE OF EMPIRES II The Conquerors



ENSEMBLE STUDIOS CONTINUES ITS POLICY OF EXPANSIONISM, REPORTS **MARCH STEPNIK**



Korean pagodas are quite pleasing to the eye - except when on the verge of collapse



BRUCEWURST

We couldn't just leave you with Bruce Shelley's fantastic quote featured in PCPP #52's Diversion pages. (To refresh your memories, "Age of Empires is like a sausage.") No, that comment did have - surprisingly - context: "I like talking in analogies, and one of them is: the Age of Empires games are like making sausage. We keep showing ideas in one end, and the sausage ends up out here [gesticulates the universal mannerism for "it was this big!"]."

"Every once in a while we go down to the end and twist off [shakes his wrist about in a twisting manner] a game, ya know, so Age was twisted off, then we did Rise of Rome, then we did Age II, and now we're twisting off The Conquerors. But there's more ideas going in the end [slaps the palm of one hand onto the thumb and index finger of a clenched fist of another, vigorously] all the time. So it's a never-ending process. You understand the concept?"

It's crystal clear, Bruce.

If there's one thing that Ensemble Studios does well, it is realtime strategy games. Look no further than *Age of Empires* and its sequel, *Age of Kings*. However if Ensemble does two things well, then the second, more exemplary one has to be (and you developers out there, pay attention) expansion packs.

Age of Empires' expansion, the *Rise of Rome* was just that - an expansion pack, *not* a mere mission pack. Not only were there a number of well-conceived new missions to be had, Ensemble included a host of significant gameplay and interface enhancements to the original experience. It also improved general play balance across the civilisations both in design hindsight and in response to the new units and technologies introduced. *Age of Empires* fans were very well looked after.

Ensemble Studios is set to continue the rockin' expansion pack trend with *Age of Empires II: The Conquerors*. "We looked for ways to improve the fun and appeal to both the hardcore fan and the casual gamer," explains **Bruce Shelley**, designer of *The Conquerors*. "Some changes appeal more to one group than another, and some to both. Part of the fun of playing the *Age* games so far is exploring all the play possibilities created by different maps, civilisations, and game types. We added more of all those things to create new opportunities for exploration."

Kyoto

To this end, there will be five new civilisations in the *Age* world to play as (or against), including the Aztecs, Huns, Koreans, Mayans, and Spanish. Each has their respective unique units and technologies to add to the fray. There will be four new campaigns to play through, documenting the exploits of Attila the Hun, El

Gid of Spain and Montezuma of the Americas. A fourth campaign has been named simply *The Conquerors*, and this is a collection of infamous battles of the middle ages starting at the Battle of Tours in 732 AD and ending with a battle in Kyoto, Japan circa 1582 AD. Other battles include Hastings and Agincourt.

The Conquerors features more map types and terrain - most notable being the winter and tropical settings. Units will leave footprints in the snow as they march, whilst players will herd turkeys instead of sheep and fend off jaguars instead of wolves on tropical maps.

There are scores of gameplay changes, too. Villagers will automatically replant farms once they've expired (via a queue at the mill) and will automatically begin gathering resources once they've finished construction of a building. It will also be possible to garrison units within rams. Players will be able to issue commands to a computer-controlled ally. And that just scratches the surface.

Strategic alliance

"Multiplayer is extremely important to the value of our games because the hardcore gamers prefer to play that way," asserts Shelley. "For the multiplayer, we have added a number of features including team colours (which makes it easier to distinguish friend and foe on the mini-map), random as a choice for civilisation and teams, improved chat, and improved saved games. And most importantly a new pass at the balancing of civilisations and units so that there is no all-powerful or all-weak link."

Not only has Ensemble tweaked the multiplayer component of *AoK* to ensure a smoother and more balanced experience, three new play modes have been added to satisfy the most delicious of driving forces within us all - variety.

King of the Hill lends itself from the popular firstperson shooter model, which has proven to work substantially better in a realtime strategy setting. To win this, players must control a monument - which is (usually) positioned at the centre of the map - for the longest period of time.

Defend the Wonder is a less dynamic variant of *King of the Hill*, with one player assigned at the beginning of the game as defender of a wonder - a position they hold for the rest of the game. Other players must capture the wonder.

The final is *Wonder Race*, which contains no combat. The first player to build a wonder wins.

Atilla the Hun, Bruce the Tease

Shelley acknowledges the role fans of the series played in the conception and development of the expansion. "The *Conquerors* was a chance for us to review all the feedback generated by fans and press (especially on fan sites). That information was used to help where we could improve play by changes or additions." So given that we, the players, made their job that much easier with *The Conquerors*, what has Ensemble been up to with all that spare time?

"The *Rise of Rome* demonstrated that a strong expansion pack can extend the life of a game and keep the experience fresh," says Shelley. "Meanwhile, we're putting in the time and investment for a major new game in the future."

For a developer that succeeds in so eloquently immersing us in the distant past, this cryptic hint concerning Ensemble's next project is a downright tease. Time will tell, but as they say - Rome wasn't built in a day, now was it? ■

DETAILS

GENRE
RTS expansion

MULTIPLAYER
Yes

DEVELOPER
Ensemble Studios

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DISTRIBUTOR
Microsoft

DUE
3rd Quarter

URL
www.microsoft.com/games/conquer



237

RIDERS

of the

STORM

Founded by best-selling author Tom Clancy, **Red Storm Entertainment** has become one of the major success stories of the games industry in recent years.

With huge hits such as **Rainbow Six** and **Rogue Spear** notched on its ammo belt, the future will see Red Storm moving into new territory. **Major Des McNicholas** leads the tango...

TOM CLANCY



Author and Chairman
Red Storm
Entertainment

"We're trying to start a new art form. We're trying to create stories in which players can get inside and play a part."

BRIAN UPTON



Director of Game Design
Red Storm
Entertainment

"The perfect game is as close to reality as possible, but still keeping it fun."

DOUG LITTLEJOHNS



President and CEO
Red Storm
Entertainment

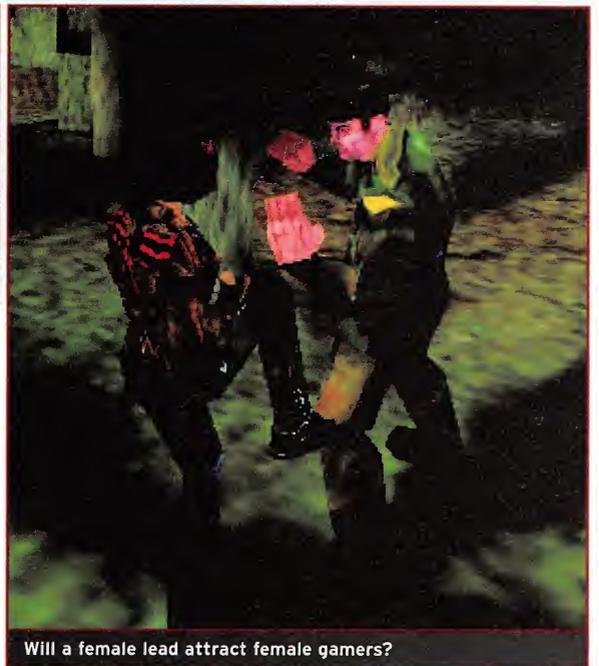
"Our goal is to give all game fans an experience they've never had before."



Based on Anne McCaffrey's novels, Freedom marks a slight change of tack for the company



Freedom still features squad tactics



Will a female lead attract female gamers?

Few games in recent years have captured players' imagination like Red Storm Entertainment's blockbuster title, *Rainbow Six*. It took action gaming to the next stage, by combining traditional FPS action with squad-based tactics, a superb onscreen environment, and an interface that actually added to the experience - kitting out your team was half the fun!

And this was no one hit wonder, as the sequels, add-ons and new releases generally maintained the pace, with Red Storm emerging as a key player in the industry. Any developer that can do that in a few short years is worth a closer look, so I welcomed the opportunity to take a peek behind the scenes (no Uzi this time!) with the help of Red Storm's Marketing Manager, **Wendy Beasley**.

Red Storm grew from the mind of author Tom Clancy, hot on the heels of worldwide best-selling novels such as *The Hunt for Red October*, *Red Storm Rising*, and *Patriot Games*. In 1996, following his involvement with Virtus Corporation's Tom Clancy's SSN submarine game, Clancy's growing interest in multimedia entertainment saw him team up with a former technical advisor, Captain Doug Littlejohns RN, to launch Red Storm Entertainment. Backed by Virtus and the Pearson media group, Red

Storm had the right mix of creative talent and industry knowledge to make a solid start. Its first release, *Politika*, was aimed very much at the niche 'readers' market (it shipped with Clancy's latest novel), but it flagged the broader approach to be taken by the company in the years to come - innovation, meticulous research, and challenging gameplay.

Pushing the envelope

If several successes and a hundred employees put Red Storm in a position to take its time and push the boundaries a little, they also give it a reputation to protect and a strong commercial focus. The result is a creative environment that's still very much grounded in traditional business processes. "Any employee can submit a concept for a game," says Beasley, "although most of the time they originate from the design department." After that initial flash of inspiration, game development at Red Storm can take anywhere from nine months to two years, starting with a 2-3 month pre-production phase in which a final concept is produced for senior management's consideration. Beasley's Marketing Department has a big say in the final decision to proceed - creativity and innovation aside, if a game won't sell, it won't pay the bills!

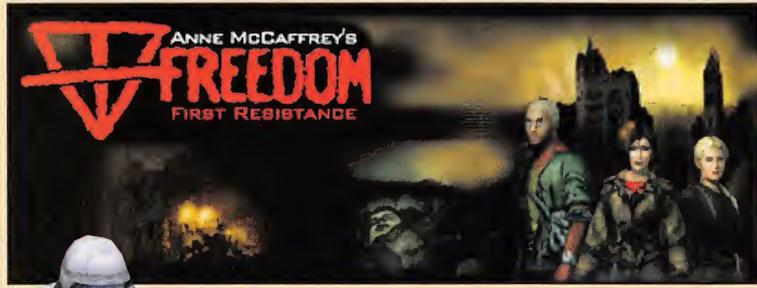
VITAL STATISTICS



Name Red Storm Entertainment
Launched 1996
URL www.redstorm.com
HQ Morrisville, North Carolina, USA
Founders Tom Clancy, Doug Littlejohns, the Virtus Corporation, and Pearson plc.
Mission To develop and to also publish stimulating entertainment for multiple media.
Biggest Hit *Rainbow Six*
Past Releases *Politika*; *Ruthless.com*; *Dominant Species*; *Rainbow Six*; *Force 21*; *Shadow Watch*; and *Rogue Spear*.
PC Titles In production *Bang! Gunship Elite* and *Freedom: First Resistance*.

FREEDOM: FIRST RESISTANCE

Literary roots aside, Freedom: First Resistance marks a significant departure for Red Storm Entertainment. Described as a "thirdperson stealth-based game with intense action and epic adventure," Freedom puts you in the role of Angel Sanchez, a resistance leader struggling to rid the world of the Catteni invasion force. In charge of a small band of stalwarts, the aim is to work your way through various missions and challenges looking for clues to aid the cause. Red Storm seems to have shifted its traditional emphasis on all-out action to a more considered approach, in a game that promises to have as much sneaking about as it does frontal assault. Freedom will also boast a brand new motion capture system and a very simple interface, adding to its chances of appealing to casual gamers who may have shied away from some of Red Storm's more complex earlier releases.

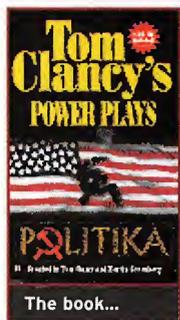


The upcoming Force 21 for Gameboy...

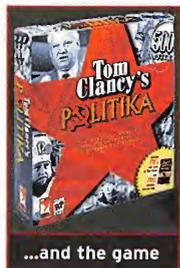
In proven multimedia fashion, once games are approved they're placed in the hands of small, dedicated teams. Red Storm currently has three teams working on projects, supported by a resource group of artists and programmers for the tricky bits - intro videos, lighting effects and sound. Most mid-sized developers adopt a similar approach, but Beasley stresses the culture of experimentation within the organisation. "Our uniqueness comes from the fact that we're willing to take chances on new and innovative game designs, instead of just creating a 'me too' clone." Director of Game Design, **Brian Upton**, gives an insight into the remarkable balance of depth and simplicity found in Red Storm titles by describing the perfect game as being "as close to reality as possible, but still keeping it fun." (He actually said "verisimilitude" but it was beyond my spell checker!)

Genre-defying

Whilst Tom Clancy still acts as a creative consultant and sounding board to the company (as well as a link into the real world of covert operations), it's clear that Red Storm has its sights set on more than just military and political games. Beasley talks enthusiastically about "genre blending", in which a game based primarily in one genre is improved by adding good ideas from another. "I think it



The book...



...and the game

BANG! GUNSHIP ELITE



Despite the "interesting" name, Bang! Gunship Elite is further confirmation of Red Storm's desire to branch into other genres. Although the honours for this one really go to France's RayLand Interactive, partnership with Red Storm will see a significantly tweaked-up version of RayLand's original product. The quality of the early visuals has the gaming community buzzing, the flight model seems to be simple and quick to master, and the range of weapons available promises to be truly awesome. It's the usual "fight for your alliance" fare, with 19 single missions and 8 person multiplayer catering for sad lonely buggers and team players alike. The emphasis is very much on action, as waves of enemy fighters demand quick reflexes and some sharp flying skills, rather than a detailed analysis of the extant tactical situation. Pretty pictures are important, but the main challenge for Red Storm will be to ensure that Bang! Gunship Elite doesn't end up as just another arcade shooter.



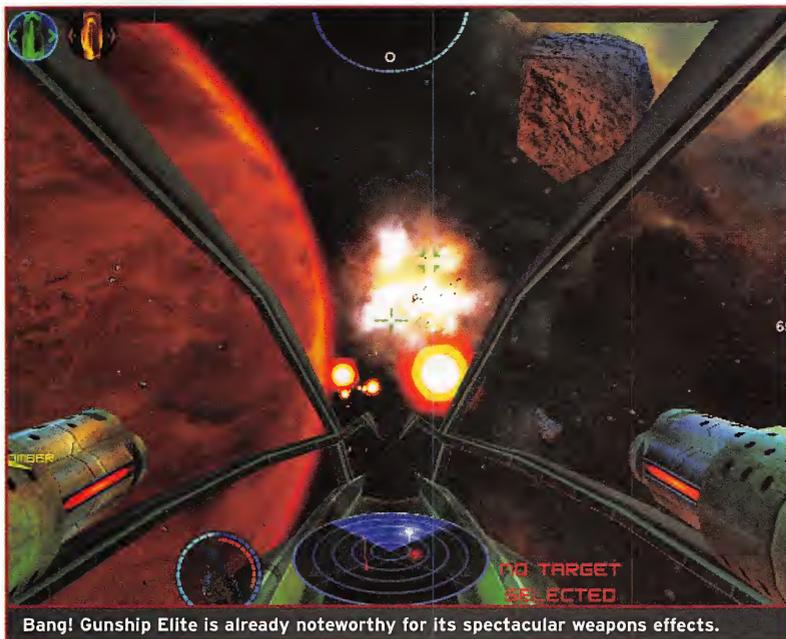
...and Rogue Spear for Playstation

started some years back with games like Masters of Orion and X Com," she explains. "We successfully blended firstperson shooting with tactical planning in Rainbow Six, and we're doing it again with this year's R6: Covert Ops Essentials." As readers of some of PCPP's more cutting reviews will know, it's not always easy to 'hide the join' when mixing genres, and Beasley clearly understands the risk. "The trick with blending is to create one good game, rather than releasing something that's really just two bad games put together."

And in getting that mix right, Red Storm isn't wedded to the PC, with **Doug Littlejohns** making a conscious decision to embrace other platforms. In fine military fashion, their website makes the objective clear: "...to become the market leader in the publishing and production of entertainment products in multiple forms - interactive computer and console games, board games and other related merchandise." It's a lofty goal, and one that means that the Sega Dreamcast,

Playstation 2, and the X-Box all present opportunities that Red Storm is eager to seize, with games developed for whatever platforms make sense in the marketplace. Interestingly, Politika was actually released in conjunction with a board game, and Red Storm has already had success with R6 for Nintendo 64, PlayStation, and Game Boy Colour.

When I pursued the Australian connection, it was clear that we're an important market for Red Storm, although the results have been a little mixed. **Rob Cross**, Director of Sales for Europe and Australia, outlines the situation Down Under. "We've seen great success with our Rainbow franchise, particularly on Playstation, which is by far the leading gaming format. But apart from hand-held GameBoy, other console formats have not succeeded, and the problems with piracy have seen legitimate sales of our PC CD ROM catalogue fall." The future looks bright enough though, as Red Storm gears up for some new launches. "Big licenses work with the typical Australian



Bang! Gunship Elite is already noteworthy for its spectacular weapons effects.



Tom Clancy acts as a creative consultant to the company

gamer," explains Cross. "Therefore the forthcoming releases that we've scheduled mean that we're looking forward to an even larger market share in a territory that's already seeing above average growth."

Past glories

Not surprisingly, Rainbow Six has Holy Grail status at Red Storm's head office. "Not just because it was our first successful title," says Beasley, "but because it was a truly groundbreaking and unique game that made people really change the way they thought about firstperson shooters. We also proved that a successful novel and a successful game could be created concurrently, and hopefully changed a lot of people's minds about gaming." They certainly achieved that.

Back in PCPP#30, Brett Robinson described R6 as having "...unprecedented levels of realism with almost flawless gameplay," and the phenomenon has just continued to grow. Fourteen issues later (PCPP #44), Rogue Spear also achieved our coveted GOLD award, and I described it as a superb representation of Special Forces operations and great fun to play. Whilst Beasley wouldn't be drawn on any further plans for the series, it's clear that Red Storm recognises the franchise's continuing potential - good news for those of us that just can't get enough!

Red Storm can't live off the back of R6 and its derivatives forever (ok - they probably can!), so they face the challenge of continuing the pace of innovation they've set over the last few years - a difficult task in such a dynamic industry. Despite the rigorous process used by the company to identify potential winners, matching innovation with commercial success is always a challenge. Force 21 (PCPP#42), for example, set new standards in graphics and general interface for RTS games, but it didn't really take off in the way it probably deserved. Similarly, Politika's follow-up, Ruthless.com (PCPP #35), was a great representation of

business' murkier side, but it lacked the sense of fun needed to attract the broader gaming community. The jury is probably still out on the imaginative cartoon-style Shadow Watch (PCPP#47 - definitely a "grow on you" title), but its initial reception by the gaming community was nothing special.

Getting the girls

Following the postponement of USS Vanguard, Red Storm's immediate PC hopes rest with two upcoming titles. Bang! Gunship Elite will be the company's first foray into space combat and, judging by its reception at E3, it has the potential to establish their credentials in a whole new genre. The emphasis is clearly on shooting, but a combination of superb visuals and solid multiplayer should attract a good audience. The second big release due out this year is the action-adventure Freedom: First Resistance. This one re-establishes Red Storm's "literary" credentials, based as it is on Anne McCaffrey's Freedom series, and success will no doubt fuel a number of sequels. As well as satisfying existing fans, Beasley hopes that Freedom's strong female lead character "will introduce Red Storm to a whole new audience of female gamers who may not have heard of

us before." Judging from the screenshots we've seen, Freedom will be one to look for in November - regardless of gender!

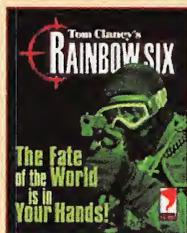
Red Storm Entertainment has some great early runs on the board, balancing some obviously niche titles with the phenomenal broader appeal of the R6 series. Whilst part of that success can be attributed to excellent marketing of the Clancy name, and the fact that this was always more than your traditional low-budget development studio, there's no denying that Red Storm houses a remarkably talented bunch of people with some great ideas. Their active pursuit of broader markets can only be good for gamers in an industry where, despite the hype, true innovation is a rare thing. Red Storm will be interesting to watch over the next few months. Bang! Gunship Elite, and Freedom: First Resistance seem to be an each-way bet in some ways - one aimed at grabbing a piece of a well established genre (with all the risks of co-production and "clone" status), and the other aimed at pushing the boundaries in more traditional Red Storm style.

Oh - and Wendy Beasley's idea of the perfect game? "One that takes three weeks to make and sells a million copies!"



DEFINITELY GOLD AT THE END OF THIS RAINBOW!

If Doug Littlejohns still had a fleet then Rainbow Six would be his flagship! The first release was a smash hit just about everywhere, combining action, squad-based tactics, meticulous research, and a great storyline. Add-on packs were followed by the official sequel, Rogue Spear, in 1999, with improved graphics, a sharper interface, and some fantastic operational environments. The add-ons keep coming, and we keep buying them!



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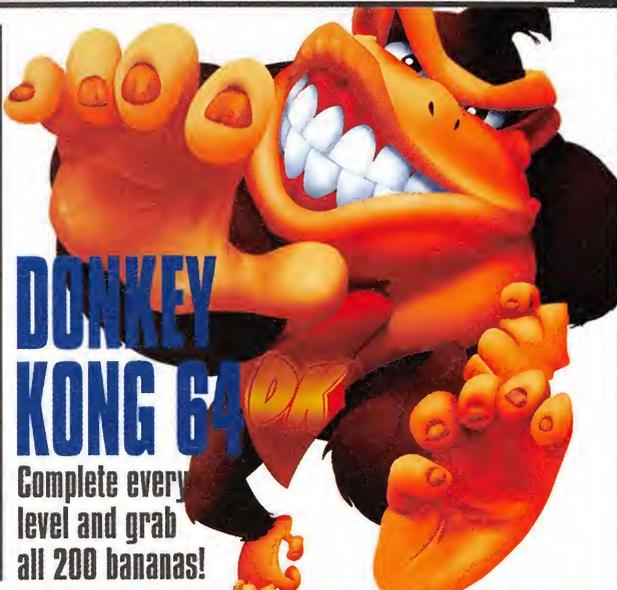
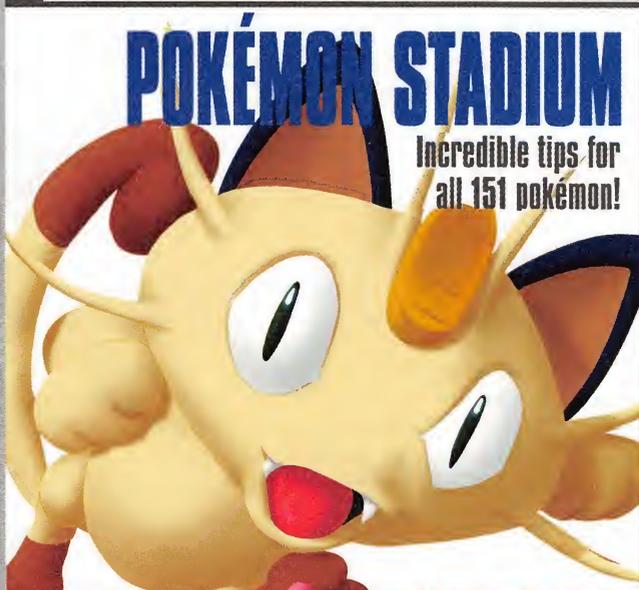
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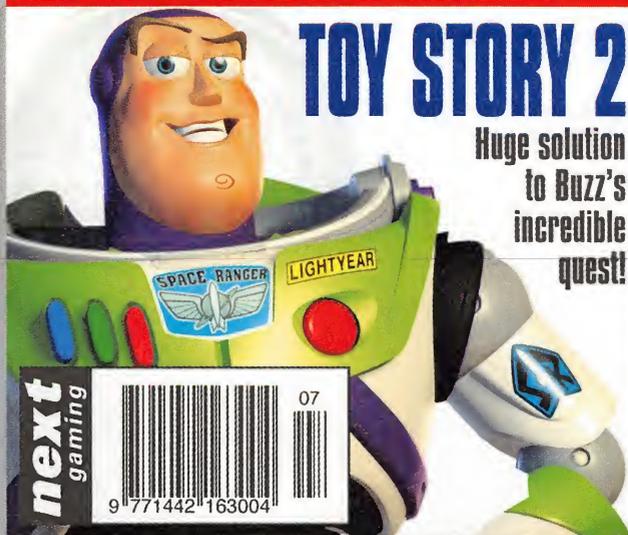
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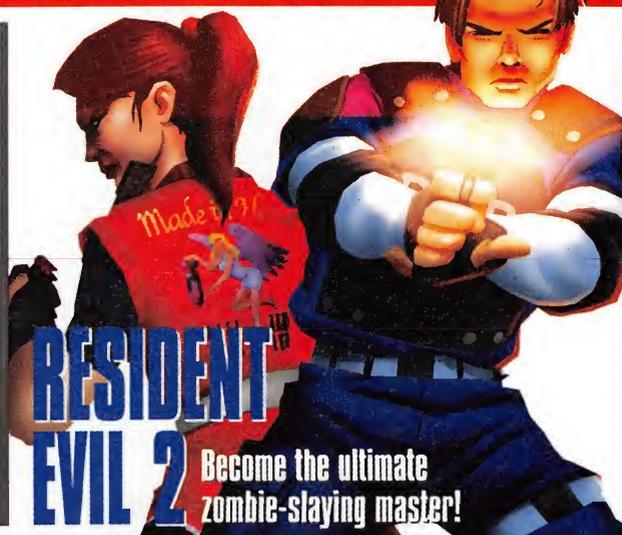
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READY 2 RUMBLE ■ RIDGE RACER 64 ■ POKEMON STADIUM ■ MARIO PARTY 2

IN REVIEW

Another fine month in PC games

INDEX



It's difficult not to make ominous predictions about the future direction of the games industry when four of our reviews this month are sequels, and another is a Playstation conversion. 'Subtle innovation' seems to be the catchphrase of this issue, and it's a blessed relief that the aforementioned titles are, indeed, worthy successors to their respective forebears.

On the whole, GP3 seems like a very worthwhile purchase, especially for the Formula One obsessives. But whether or not it has been worth the four-year wait is certainly a bone of contention. The fact that an overwhelming proportion of mods created for GP2 are transferred easily to GP3 speaks volumes about the integrity of the game's code. RPG buffs will be pleased to note the simultaneous release of Baldur's Gate 2 and Diablo II. Both are obviously geared toward opposite ends of the spectrum, but those with an appreciation for the differing styles of each title will find the experiences rewarding.

Perhaps the most pleasant surprise this month has been Earth 2150. A series that began with an above average RTS has evolved into a game set to rival the mighty Age of Empires II. Definitely worth checking out.

brett@next.com.au



52 Baldur's Gate 2

Pumpette makes her debut

56 Earth 2150

It's amazing how much a game can improve in a decade

60 Grand Prix 3

Formula 1's Holy Grail, or just GP2.1?

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We welcome the return of the Lord of Darkness

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Better late than never

70 Dino Crisis

Raptors and scares galore

72 Metal Fatigue

Realtime strategy with a giant robot flavour

74 Klingon Academy

Graduate from the school of mutated foreheads



THE PCPP REVIEW SYSTEM

SCORING

- 90+** Gold Award. A classic, everyone will love this game.
- 89-80** A strong title that's hard to fault. But perhaps not the best in its field.
- 79-60** Competent and playable. For fans of the genre.
- 59-40** Decidedly average, probably boring.
- 39-0** A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid.

Need The minimum requirements to get the game running at a playable speed.

Want The ideal system requirements for the game.

For The major reasons why you'll like the reviewed game.

Against The major reasons why you won't.

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BALDUR'S GATE II

With this stunning sequel, Black Isle is at the height of its power

DETAILS

GENRE
AD&D geeky RPG

MULTIPLAYER
Yes (1-6)

DEVELOPER
Bioware

PUBLISHER
Black Isle

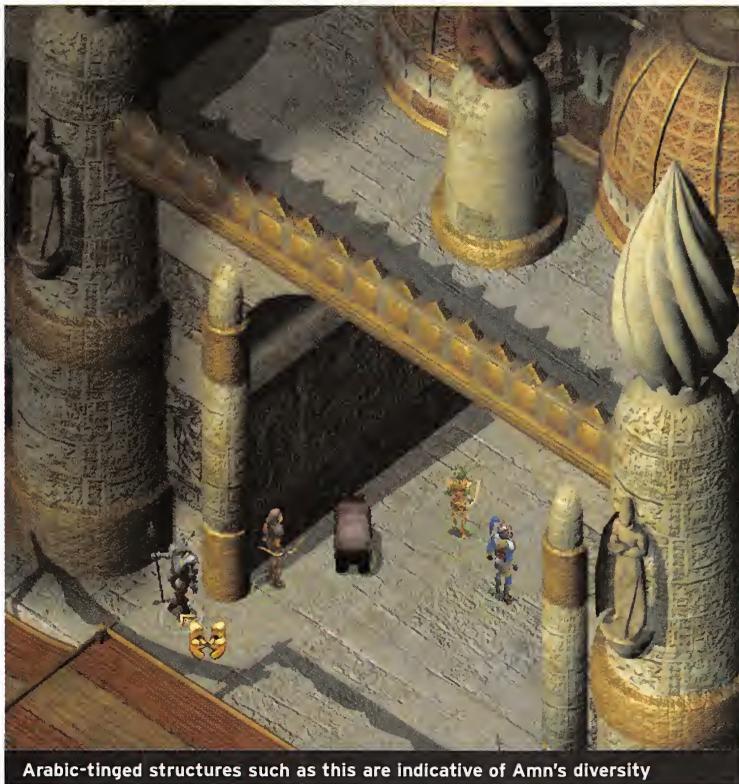
DISTRIBUTOR
Interplay

AVAILABLE
Now

RATING
M

NEED
P-200, 16Mb RAM,
320Mb HDD

WANT
PII, 128Mb RAM, 3D
Videocard, 2GB
HDD



Arabic-tinged structures such as this are indicative of Amn's diversity



The work of some mad mage, no doubt



'Tis but a scratch!

You studiously inspect your surrounds. A nondescript fireplace houses a deceptively insipid wood fire: its tendrils cast a soft golden glow upon the inhabitants of the room. The resulting shadows are enticing - their erratic play at once soothing and foreboding. Gazing out the window, you indulge in the fading moments of the setting of the sun; the remnants in the air of a recent and most hearty meal tickle your nose and pull you back into the room, reminding you that you feel - in the gastronomic sense at least - sublimely fulfilled. As you absently stroke your belly, you decide that this state of mind is the result of many particulars this evening has brought, not least of all the soft seating that cradles your rear end.

You focus on the light conversations about you that have filled the night, and

learn that the greatest storyteller of the known lands is due to make an imminent appearance. From beyond your field of vision a man strolls in - his features neither bold nor handsome, his stature neither great nor heroic - and sets himself upon the velvet throne. In hindsight his appearance would be described simply as pleasing.

Then he speaks, and an incredible transformation takes place. He recounts a miserable journey to the inn in which you are sitting - adding that it was miserable only in comparison to the warmth and comfort of this glorious setting. His entire body gesticulating the words he delivers. The eyes draw you in, yet it is the voice that proves to be the most entrancing aspect of his persona. A peculiar intonation and articulation of words animates his speech, such that for a brief moment, you feel as though it was only moments ago

that you rode in with him into town. His entrance into this common room now seems a distant event, though a quick glance at an ornate clock on the farthest wall in the room indicates that only a few fleeting moments have passed. The room has hushed and waits expectantly for the storyteller. He briefly holds the gaze of each and every pair of eyes in the audience, before allowing a deep intake of air.

He pauses... then opens his mouth, and begins:

"Mary had a wittew wamb. It'th fweeth - wath white ath thnow."

And you notice that horrible lisp...

The art of storytelling

Baldur's Gate (from Canadian born and based Bioware) won critical acclaim worldwide. Australia in particular succumbed to its charms, making it our most purchased game of 1999. An RPG outselling all other genres in Australia? This event would have almost been surprising if it wasn't for the great calibre of the Baldur's Gate experience. An RPG in the classic mould, BG gave players a fantastic adventure drenched with monster-bashing, experience-gathering, item-acquiring gameplay.



Ummm...



Uh-oh!



Run!!!

ÜBER-QUESTS

Each main character type in BGII has the opportunity to embark on a particular subquest that will see an increase to their standing within Amn. Should players succeed, they will be rewarded with some highly impressive material.

The fighter gains a keep.

The paladin gets the Holy Avenger, a +5 sword which gives protection from evil and emits a dispel magic field. It is one of the most powerful items a paladin can get.

The ranger scores a forest hideout.

A druid has the chance to be ordained a Great Druid.

The bard - becomes the proprietor of a theatre.

Magic users gain a Mage Hall. And to highlight the benefits of these rewards - a mage in a mage hall gains a Golem of their very own to command, as well as apprentices beneath them which can be asked to create items for use by your character.



Several characters from the original make a welcome return appearance



The increased graphical resolution is much appreciated



Wizards proved effective quarry workers



Athkatla dwarfs the city of Baldur's Gate



Quests are far more inspired

But when all's said and done, Baldur's Gate was a flawed title. Sure, every inch of the Sword Coast of Faerun (yep, even the repeated inches) was gorgeously detailed and a sight to behold. Absolutely Bioware did an outstanding job in giving the mystifyingly complex AD&D 2nd Edition rules system a home on the PC. Without a doubt there were some spectacular moments to be had. There's no disputing that Bioware gave much freedom both in customisation and player expression to extract a potentially powerful roleplaying journey. BG had all the tools required to ensure true masterpiece status - but it didn't quite make it.

And that was because what it lacked was soul. As with our esteemed storyteller - the setting was near perfect: the stage

was set for a spine-tingling tale to be told. There was a willing audience. But when it came down to it, what came out was clichéd and uninspiring. BG sorely lacked a compelling narrative to drive players through the game.

Shadows of Amn - Baldur's Gate's next of kin - is another matter altogether. It bears all the markings of an anticipated sequel: a bigger gameworld; updated graphics; smoother animation; more quests; extra monsters; new items; updated audio and a refined interface. It's clear from the very outset that Bioware drew from the lessons learned during BG's development process and the feedback of its fans, and has tweaked the Infinity Engine within an inch of its life. And their fans wouldn't have expected any less.

Yet all the wonderful technical (and artistic) achievements of Shadows of Amn

are overshadowed by one particular event: Bioware's maturity into a world-class storyteller of the computer games medium. The implementation of these newfound narrative skills in SoA upon the solid foundations of the Baldur's Gate engine sees a far more engaging and enjoyable RPG experience. If you thought Baldur's Gate was good -well, Shadows of Amn will simply blow you away.

Mephits

Shadows of Amn begins in the bowels of a dungeon, with a chilling cutscene of a seemingly powerful wizard putting you through an immense amount of pain and suffering. At regular intervals, he hints at some incredible potential that you, as the main protagonist, purportedly have. Yep, it seems that your exploits in and around the city of Baldur's Gate has brought some interested parties your way. Who these parties are, however, remains a mystery.





Dense jungles are the Ranger's domain

A rather ornate prison interior

A-taaaack!

Play proper commences once the wizard leaves you to rest and an old adventuring companion (and kindred spirit) - Imoen - breaks you out of your prison cell. In nearby cages you find Jaheira and the inseparable Minsc and Boo - Minsc's beloved hamster - all reprising their roles from BG. You dutifully set out to free your captured comrades, and escape the dangerous place.

What follows is the entirety of chapter one of SoA (there are again seven chapters

in the game), ending with your escape from your captor's prison. Chapter two sees you emerge in the heart of Athkatla, capital city of Amn, soon after which your captor and a key party member are extradited to a distant compound by a council of mages for the unsanctioned use of magic in their fair city. Your next task seems obvious: you must rescue your taken comrade, and discover what the mad mage wanted with you in the first place. From here you are lead on an absolutely thrilling and rewarding journey through the state of Amn, the region directly to the south of the Sword Coast - the location of the previous adventures in Baldur's Gate.

Wandering around the underbelly of Athkatla and beyond, you can't help but marvel at the detailed visuals present in the game. SoA features a host of new environs, taking it beyond typical fantasy convention. For example, the intro dungeon has a strong steampunk type feel (not unlike the more technologically enhanced setting of Planescape: Torment), a nice change to the traditional feel of Baldur's Gate. Amn's capital Athkatla features more ornate building and structures, giving it a post-renaissance Italy type of dressing.

Notwithstanding the many wilderness areas and smaller towns throughout Amn, SoA takes players beyond to Elven forests, an underwater city, a mountainous region, and the astral plane to name but a few. Each region has a decidedly different theme to it, giving wonderful variety to play. With support now for 800x600 resolution, and the inclusion of 3D acceleration for spell, lighting, water and fog effects, the engine has never looked so good.

Also updated are the cutscenes. Most are now engine driven (fullscreen too), and are presented more frequently. The video scenes have received a make-over, being delivered now in static animation style - much like the cutscenes in Thief: The Dark Project. From the intro video and beyond, their effects are spine tingling.

Compelling

Bioware has injected an equal measure of loving attention into the quests of Shadows of Amn, addressing another element lacking in the first. While the game critical quests of BG managed to hold your interest, the majority of the many subquests (the substance of any RPG) were short on innovation, let alone coherence. The number of basic item and bounty quests left you



GET YOUR KITS ON

BGIII gives players the choice of character kits - or specialist characters - during the character creation process. Character kits come with bonuses for certain skills and abilities. For example, a ranger can now choose to specialise as an archer, which gives him or her a distinct advantage when using bow weapons. However, each advantage has a disadvantage to balance game play, and in this case, the archer can't wear armour any heavier than leather.



Character pathfinding has improved greatly



The map screen: without question, the measure of every good RPG

3RD EDITION AD&D

Bioware has also given us a sneak preview of the AD&D 3rd Edition rule system due for release soon. Three new classes are available - the monk, the sorcerer, and the barbarian. The AD&D rule system can be intimidating stuff if you're not an AD&D enthusiast. So Bioware has included a simple tutorial set in the Duchal Palace in Baldur's Gate - a prelude of sorts to chapter one of the game. During the tutorial, players will be introduced to the basic play mechanics, as well as combat and spell casting. Thieving abilities are also run through, so that players new to AD&D and the Baldur's Gate series are aware of character capabilities from the onset.



Adopting a formation...



...is far safer than idle wandering

Bioware has injected loving attention into the quests

you, seeking to settle the score. His berserker rage gives him the strength to bend the bars; Minsc thanks you for the mind trickery employed to give him the strength to release himself and willingly joins your party. Wonderful stuff! Such characterisation features through the game, and is often put to use as a narrative tool. Not all encounters are as light-hearted as these - SoA is a considerably darker, and richer roleplaying experience.

Bioware may not have reinvented the wheel with Baldur's Gate II - Shadows of Amn. What they have done is present a deliciously engaging roleplaying adventure which is hard to fault. This is simply the best old-school AD&D RPG out there, and up there with the legendary Planescape: Torment. All lovers of adventure games should indulge in Shadows of Amn now!

You smile to yourself as you recount the bard's last, lacking performance. He has improved with age - a true master at storytelling this figure has proven to be. The end of the tale leaves you breathless. Well-crafted tales are a scarcity in the realm, so you are boundlessly thankful that you got to experience one fit for a king.

March Stepnik

feeling like you were the errand boy or girl of the realm. More often than not, these were rather simplistic and short, and did little to enhance the overall story or create the sense of a living, breathing world about you.

Much more thought has gone into the construction of SoA's quests, and the result is a truly engaging style of play. Conversation plays a greater role in quests too, with NPCs often asking the player quite pointed questions - riddles abound - upon which careful consideration or a legion of hell-spawn. One such quest requires that you infiltrate the ranks of an established guild so that you can find incriminating evidence and murder their leader. Normally, a quest such as this could be decided upon quite easily based on your alignment. However, to make the decision that much more engaging, your most recently acquired party member is mixed up in the affair and

politely requests that you help him out, which involves accepting the quest. The possible benefits of doing this quest could also bring you a step closer to your captured friend. The decision making process of SoA is an incredible achievement, and does wonders in immersing you within the story and world.

A particular favourite quest that perfectly highlights Bioware's improved command of characterisation and narrative, features at the game's beginning. (WARNING! SPOILER ALERT!) Jaheira's locked cell is easily opened, however Minsc's seems curiously impenetrable. You set out to find a magical key or switch to free him from his confines. Turning the dungeon over fails to find an escape route for Minsc, you return to the cell to (truthfully) inform him that you can't find a way to release him. He isn't pleased. He accuses you of desertion and turns on

PCPP

FOR

- 200+ hours of gameplay
- Stunning visuals
- Compelling story
- More of everything else

AGAINST

- AD&D may not be everyone's cup of tea
- Um... that's it!

OVERALL

An outstanding RPG. Simple as that.

93%



EARTH 2150

Arriving out of nowhere, this is an undiscovered gem of realtime strategy

DETAILS

GENRE

3D RTS Total War

MULTIPLAYER

Yes (1-8 via LAN)

DEVELOPER

Topware Interactive

PUBLISHER

SSI

DISTRIBUTOR

Mattel Interactive

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

M

NEED

PII-233, 32Mb RAM, 450Mb HDD, 4Mb 3D Videocard

WANT

PII-400, 64Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D Videocard



This scene's tranquility belies the veracity of the inevitable conflict



An impenetrable defensive fortification



Powerful headlights cut through the fog

I need to find something that's wrong with this game. You have to understand, I'm looking really closely, studying all the details, checking all the angles but I still can't find what I need. Just one major flaw. Because if I can find a flaw, find something wrong with this game, then this review won't sound like an absolute drooling rave. Because frankly, that's what it is. An absolute bloody drooling fall to the floor clutching the PC in delight while kissing it through tears for its good service, rave.

It's a good game. It's brilliant. Hell, I'd say that what we have here is a contender for best damn game of the year and the only game I've played with a real chance of knocking Age of Empires II of its chair.

War machines

Let's go having a look, shall we? Basically, yes, Earth 2150 is a realtime strategy game, but even if you are not a big fan of the genre, don't go away, because it's really a rather improved version thereof. There are three forces to choose from: the Lunar Corporation, the Eurasian Dynasty and the United Civilised States. The factions, which battle dreadfully in a highly propaganda influenced war each have distinctive aesthetics, technology and war tactics.

The Lunar Corporation are a more neutral race with some interesting high tech gear. This is traded off by weaker war machines. Mainly capitalists, they tend to be removed somewhat from the war. The Eurasian Dynasty are a vast machine using communistic empire that has used cybernetics and huge environmentally invasive technology. The UCS is a decadent race that uses machines and robots over all in its armies, allowing its rich citizens to watch battles from home.

Graphically this is all represented extremely well. Setting up a home base for an LC army is all about watching dirigibles drop off huge equipment, but for ED armies, you watch as huge machines begin to churn the earth and foul the skies with your toxins. It's actually exciting to watch. It's the little things that separate the big boys and this game is filled with these little Easter eggs of cultural verisimilitudes.

While looking at the visuals of the game, attention should be directed over to the game environment itself. The planet is starkly rendered here. It's rocky, harsh, filled with great seas and high mountain ranges and gravel quarries and marshy lake land. And best of all, it is in true 3D. Yep. The game is a beautiful mix of landscapes all in three dimensions which adds depth not only to whatever it is you are looking at on screen but also to gameplay itself.

More importantly, the game does exactly what so many other games have failed to do. The camera is totally free floating and allows some extreme zooms in and out. Scrolling, tilting, zooming, and rotating are all accomplished by using a simple mouse interface. Not only does this



Choppers converge on the enemy base

SMART TACTICS

When sieging enemy installations, be sure to bring heaps of rockets. And concentrate fire on a target before moving on. Heavy firepower is efficient against buildings in the extreme and the way to seriously cripple an enemy is to target his research installations and energy centres. This will end current research and shut down all power. Important secondary targets are aerial flight supports. Of course, headquarters and main bases are also extremely tempting. But your raids should also be heavily supported by aircraft and keep something in reserve. You never know when the worst will happen.



Earth 2150's undulating terrain has a tangible effect on gameplay



Shockwaves highlight the destruction



Surprise attacks occur as night falls

showcase the wonderful world as well as the design of the units and buildings, but the ease of camera use and the total 3D give the game some rather elegant combat properties.

The closest I've seen to this variety of interface is the excellent Imperium Galactica 2. However, Earth 2150 uses larger battle field scope so the effect is showcased here to a heavier impact. Its basic effect is to create gameplay which is not only practical and functional but also elegant and beautiful.

Unlike the disaster that was Force Commander, the camera angles are at all times easily shifted and you can view the battles and the encampments both from a purely tactical level and from angles that, while aren't the most useful, are certainly packed to the gills with a certain coolness. Use lots of aircraft, because the 3D really comes out in a battle with air support.

Decisions, decisions

Combat is vicious, ruthless and clever in 2150. It's not the kind of game where you simply save up the cash to buy the best tank one hundred times over then wham. Oh no. Do that and enemies will just research a tank ripping weapon and it's lights out for you. There is a handy split screen option allowing you to view several different bases at one time. As your empires grow and become sprawling things, you'll find that dividing your screen into three selectable areas is desirable.

You'll also have to account for many other elements during battle. Your own troops must be supplied with ammunition. Keeping them supplied, keeping your suppliers safe while at the same time having enough troops of a decent variety is complex and always keeps you on your toes. Research has to be carefully planned. Yes, you may get those new and amazing



The Eurasian Dynasty isn't popular with environmentalists



Blinkers are standard on tanks of the future

missiles but do you want to put them on an outmoded chassis? Do you need more supply aircraft for those missiles? Earth 2150 is full of decisions like these.

Everything you manage in the game is inextricably linked to everything else. Learning the relationships between your units' various strengths and weaknesses and applying your own strategy to offset their shortcomings is a richly rewarding element of the game and one to pay careful attention to. Thankfully, unit pathing algorithms used in the game are of a fine quality and you'll not have to suffer stupid robots having a bit of a wander during your big pushes.

Weather has to be a determinant factor as well. When it gets dark, it gets very dark. Floodlights and unit headlights can be the only illumination if radar isn't up and running, ignoring enemy stealth capable troops. Beware killer fogs. The bastard things sneak up and even your most secure holds become things that you patrol with intense paranoia. A quick strike in bad weather can win or lose scenarios. In the end, good resource management and research wins the game, not fire power. The Tenebrae mission is a particularly fine example of this. In perpetual darkness, surrounded by mountainous territory a good tactical mind and a fine hair trigger madness will win. Massive tank armies just get bogged down and ambushed.

ONLINE

www.earth2150.com
Official site



<http://www.epicclass.com/Earth-2150/Maps/Maps.htm>
Some lovely maps.



<http://www.geocities.com/earth2150/info/>
Assorted Goodies.





The frenetic pace of the game's cinematics adds greatly to their impact...



The aftermath of a lengthy battle



Choke points thwart armoured assaults



...as does their visual splendour



Tank rushes are a no-no

Dramatic theatre

The entire scope of the gaming is enhanced by the addition of the third dimension within the game. While there have been other games that certainly incorporated air, sea and land war, I've really played none quite like this. Terrain is of vital importance to strategy as is the fascinating concept of having tunnelling vehicles and attacks. Suddenly a coastal base can literally have to face assaults in four separate theatres of war. It changes not only your tactical thinking but in fact your entire spatial perception. Mature forward thinking is required and I again press home the point that a variety of factors is what wins scenarios, not overwhelming armour.

I feel justified in saying that the addition of a 3D element will become mandatory for RTS gaming from here on in. There is a richness to textures in the environment as well as an elegance to the motion of war units. Nothing like watching miniature battlemechs storming across hinterlands and desert. Nor like watching huge battleships open fire on foolish shore based structures.

Please allow one final note of lavish praise for this game. The animations and full motion videos are absolute monsters.

a quick strike in bad weather can win or lose scenarios

Pure models of beauty they tantalise and excite with their sheer dramatic coolness. With designs like this one can only look to the future of gaming with a facile grin.

Now, because I'm a grumpy old bastard, I'm going to pick some horrible little details. No game is perfect but I feel like a bit of a cheap gimp picking out faults like this. The colours are a tad on the dull side. The inner mechanics of the game are quite complicated and you really can't just jump in and start shooting and hunting and killing. Occasionally it seems to be too complex for the realtime it evolves in. The music is too soft.

If it sounds like I'm reaching for faults here, you're a good listener. Earth 2150 is a tremendous game, one that had even a man who plays games twenty four seven excited to be switching on the PC and itching for the game to load. It's addictive, it's immersive, it's hard, fast and most of all it's intelligent fun of the right kind. Fans of the genre, listen hard. Buy This Game.

Christian Read

PCPP

FOR

- Fantastic visuals
- Great AI and great interface
- Beautiful designs
- Brilliant FMV

AGAINST

- Not much, dude
- Bit complex maybe

OVERALL

Possibly the most complete realtime strategy game ever!

91%



“YOU WANT
CONTENT
WITH
THAT?”

You want it all.
You want games news and you want it now.
You want the latest reviews and you want them real.
You want downloads and you want them first.
You want your favourite games magazines online.
You want contentment.

next
more content

GRAND PRIX 3

Is four years of testing enough to take pole position?

DETAILS

GENRE

Racing Sim

MULTIPLAYER

Yes (1-22 via LAN, Modem, Hotseat)

DEVELOPER

Microprose

PUBLISHER

Hasbro Interactive

DISTRIBUTOR

Hasbro Interactive

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

G

NEED

P-266, 64Mb RAM, 250Mb HDD, 4xCD, 16-bit Videocard

WANT

Pii-450, 128Mb RAM, 8xCD, 3D Videocard (D3D)



The Ferrari out in front where it should be

GP3 still suffers from severe slowdown at the start

It's finally here! That's right ladies and gents, (well, mostly gents I would imagine) the latest benchmark for the Formula One racing genre is gracing PCs all over the world once again, and no surprise folks that it's a Geoff Crammond title.

For those who have been living under a rock for the last ten years, the name of Geoff Crammond likely holds little, if any importance. For the record, and to put things in perspective, this English gent has for many years been consistently aligned with the creme del la creme of the virtual motor sporting genre. From early titles such as Revs on the Commodore 64 to the genius of Stunt Car Racer and the first Grand Prix title on the Amiga, up until today with the release

of Grand Prix 3, Crammond has consistently proven his worth to the industry with every keystroke and every line of code he has ever written. Since the advent of Grand Prix 2 back in 1996, the world of virtual racing enthusiasts have been eagerly awaiting the next incarnation of the GP series - and with that traditional Crammond wave of the wand, we are in awe once again!

Upgrade time

No doubt, the main question Crammond fans the world over have been anxious to ask is "Does GP3 surpass GP2?" The answer is yes. Though unfortunately not by a staggering margin. Certainly there have been many improvements in the graphics, physics and gameplay departments, all of

which provide that same simulation goodness that the GP series is renowned for. However their sum really only constitutes an upgrade from GP2 as opposed to an entirely new game. In fact the leap of quality could easily be aligned to the traditional "one" step forward syndrome we witness annually from EA Sports titles.

It's really quite remarkable how similar GP3 plays compared to its predecessor. Anybody who wet their feet in the glory of GP2 will find the migration to GP3 an easy task to accomplish. Not only are the interface and available options almost identical, but the actual crust of the game - the driving itself - is so uncannily similar that you would be forgiven if you thought it actually was GP2. From the visuals and vehicle physics to the still frustratingly short instant replays, if you didn't look close enough it would be hard to tell the two games apart.

Granted, for any title to be a true sequel, naturally it must contain elements and an overall theme resembling its predecessor. But when you could easily cut and paste the review text from the older sim and present it as the new is when things are getting a little out of hand. Take the game interface for example. This element of both GP2 and GP3 is so





While the game's options are comprehensive and authentic, the addition of a Career mode would have extended the longevity quite considerably



Camera angles are varied, if not exactly practical

similar in design, one can only assume that Crammond simply felt he couldn't improve on it. All of the options are basically identical, with a few newbies thrown in here and there to accommodate the few new features of the sequel.

Having said that, anyone new to the GP series is in for a treat. There is the Quick Race - a short race at any track with a pre-determined or random qualifying position. The tried and proven Practice mode is the



The cockpit is a noticeable improvement

AWWW, I'M SO LONELY!

The biggest disappointment in Grand Prix 3 is the sad lack of any decent multiplayer. Grand Prix Legends has clearly set the benchmark in these stakes with its awesome efforts providing stable online racing for anywhere from 2 to 40 drivers. Many hoped this would be duplicated in GP3, making it the greatest in all areas, but alas, Crammond's thoughts on this matter are obscure at best. Any attempt to encourage him to comment on other games draws the inevitable answer of "no comment". Unless Microprose plans to compete with Papyrus, its games will continue to be second best in the eyes of hardcore sim players.

the vehicles now have much less grip compared to previous years

best way to learn and hone skills on any circuit. The Non-Championship Race presents a single, full weekend event at a venue of the player's choosing. Lastly, the big daddy of 'em all, the Full Championship Season consists of entire weekend events including qualifying, practice, and warm up sessions prior to the race itself, taking place at all of the sixteen official 1998 FIA F1 World Championship circuits.

It's disappointing that the options go no further than these bare essentials. For many

this won't be an issue, but for veterans of the GP series, winning races and championships isn't anything new. The next level of challenge should have included a Career mode at the very least - not to mention management options or some historical re-enactments - but sadly everything is as it was four years ago.

First corner trouble

The similarities don't stop there either. The graphics engine is also extremely



representative of what we were witness to four years ago. Naturally, the physical appearance of the vehicles and circuits has changed in accordance with the real life alterations that have occurred since the 1994 season. They do look very cool, though unfortunately it's rather like creating a new car using an old engine. Hardware acceleration is finally included as is a software mode. But regardless of the hardware support, that tragic "slow-mo" effect witnessed in GP2 is still present even



Monaco: crap racetrack, but it looks pretty in screenshots like this one



It's surprising the difference an animated wheel can make

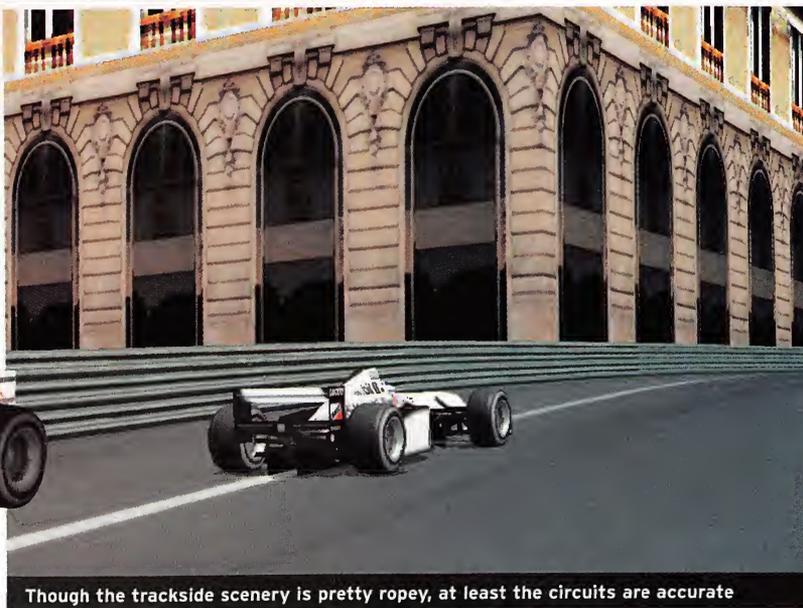


A McLaren: boring!

OLD ENGINE, OLD TOOLS

Race, fail, race, and eventually win. This cycle, no matter what your level of enthusiasm eventually begins to get a little boring. When it comes to lastability, it's the genre of simulation that generally suffers the most.

Thankfully, amongst the hordes of devoted GP followers, a dedicated few have seen fit to expand on the greatest sim of all time. Like GP2 before it, Grand Prix 3 is now immediately being ripped apart from head to tail in an attempt to design add-ons and mods that lengthen the game's lifespan. Tellingly, the general consensus amongst the external GP developers is that the code is so similar that modifying existing utilities for GP3 is very easy, if even required at all.



Though the trackside scenery is pretty ropery, at least the circuits are accurate

on the most sophisticated of machines. This phenomenon is most evident at the start of any event: when the red lights go out, the action slows down as the poorly managed resources begin to get bogged down with data. With its already awry reputation, turn one of lap one at any event is made all the more difficult due to this effect.

Bad points aside though, the candy is as awesome as it ever was in GP2. The cars are very detailed at all levels, and the tracks themselves are almost exact replicas of their real life counterparts. All circuits have been painstakingly recreated with the help of the Arrows Formula One team, coupled with extensive satellite and onboard telemetry data. The vehicle cockpit has had a major work over, and

now sports a wheel that actually turns, with tyres that do the same. These changes tremendously increase the feeling of actually being in the cockpit. By far the most impressive visual addition to the GP series is that of wet weather effects. Stunning is the only word that can describe the awe-inspiring bliss of a wet weather event. From the realistic spray from water off the tyres to the gorgeous reflection of the puddles of water that accumulate on the track, all round the effect looks convincingly realistic.

Getting down to the guts of the title, the driving is where Grand Prix 3 shines. With the implementation by the FIA of new vehicle regulations at the end of the 1997 season, with the intention of bringing the

teams closer on a competitive level, Crammond had a major task ahead of him trying to implement these new changes into the game. No surprise then that the job has been done with flying colours. The vehicles now have much less grip compared to previous years, and the gearing for utmost power is now more of a ratio art than a science. Forget any aspirations of using old driving lines and setups as each and every track is going to require some serious R&D time before you start replicating times achieved in GP2.

Dry weather racing aside, when it comes to mastering these 800hp vehicles in the wet, patience and ability will be pushed to the utmost limits. So much as the slightest slip, over-rev from the engine, or fraction of

ONLINE

www.grandprixgames.com
The official Grand Prix 3 site.





A Benetton: not a good advertisement for FedEx this season



A skilled driver uses every inch of the road



The crowd keels over in excitement

AND ON, AND ON, AND ON...

As both Nick Court and Geoff Crammond have stated in separate interviews, Grand Prix 3 is the first in a yearly series of Grand Prix title releases.

Court even went so far as to state that Grand Prix 5 will be an amazing, ground-breaking effort in both the realms of realism and online play. This leaves a big question mark over the level of quality we can expect to see in just one year of development. Precedence has shown that in order to produce any quality enhancements, a year just isn't long enough. But we're talking about Geoff Crammond here, and his name alone will definitely have me queuing to be one of the first to get a copy.

Schumacher will do everything to block you in the later stages of a race

the tyre on the ripple strip in wet conditions, and the vehicle will make a quick visit to its old friend the brick wall faster than you can say "loss of traction".

If you're a newbie, just relax, because as always, Crammond has catered for you too. As in GP1 and GP2, Grand Prix 3 sports an extensive set of driver aids which help drivers of any skill level pull the most from this realistic sim. Like anything in motorsport, starting off slow then testing one limit at a time, and removing aids only when confident with ability to drive without them, any virtual driver can achieve Schumacher-like glory as long as enough time is invested.

Intelligent drivers

The major change I noticed when in my first ever stint behind the wheel on GP3 was the stunning realism of the AI cars. No longer does it feel like you're driving against a bunch of drones. Each vehicle accurately represents the nature of the driver piloting the vehicle. Stables like Minardi crash-out often, whereas the slipstreaming, race winning likes of Hakkinen and Schumacher will do everything to pass or block you in the later stages of a race.

Really, the only shortfall when it comes to control of the vehicle is the lack of dual-axis joystick/wheel support, which drastically limits smooth control of the throttle/brakes. While not a major problem

for the majority of the game, when searching for tenths during those tight qualifying sessions it can cause major problems by limiting ability where it should and needs to be in abundance.

The last port of call is multiplayer functionality - or lack of it. Don't get me wrong, there is indeed a multiplayer facet, just like GP2, and even TCP/IP support. However the quality of connection whilst utilising any of the modes in more than a 1-on-1 capacity is dismal to say the least.

In conclusion, the Grand Prix series and Grand Prix 3 in particular once again retains the crown as best of the best. Any driver new to the series will be blown away by the realism and quality of this sim. However for the hardcore contingency, already familiar with the series, expectations are yet to be fully met. Is it the best so far? Yes. Has it reached its potential? Not yet.

Edward Fox

PCPP

FOR

- A highly authentic simulation
- Convincing AI
- Lovely weather

AGAINST

- A terrible multiplayer code
- Not a major leap from GP2
- Needs more options

OVERALL

The best modern day Formula One sim to date

88%

DIABLO II

Playing as a female character is not a reflection of your sexuality. Is it?

DETAILS

GENRE

Roleplaying
Click-Fest

MULTIPLAYER

Yes
(1-8 via Battle.net)

DEVELOPER

Blizzard North

PUBLISHER

Blizzard

DISTRIBUTOR

Havas

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

M

NEED

P-233, 32Mb RAM,
650Mb HDD

WANT

P11-400, 64Mb
RAM, 2Gb HDD,
8Mb Videocard
(Glide, D3D)



Spectacular spell effects are enhanced by 3D acceleration



The desert is home to multitudes of undesirables



The Sorceress' Nova spell keeps enemies at a distance

ONLINE

www.blizzard.com/diablo2
Diablo II's homepage

www.diabloii.net
Diablo II resources
and forums

guildtimes.diabloii.net
Guild news and
signup info

Over the years, Blizzard Entertainment have earned a reputation as a development house of perfectionists. Never ones to rely on patches to render their products complete, Blizzard have perfected the art of shrugging off the impatience of rabid fans, only releasing games when they're virtually bug-free. As a result of this policy, Blizzard have risen to the upper echelons of the industry, and exist as a shining example to countless development studios the world over. After a development cycle rivaling Daikatana and Ultima: Ascension's marathon efforts, Diablo II is finally complete. And, as is to be expected, it lives up to Blizzard's admirable standards in every respect.

A role reversal

At the conclusion of the original game, the hero made the ultimate sacrifice by stabbing the soulstone imprisoning Diablo into his own forehead. It was hoped that by doing so, Diablo's power would be contained within the body of this strong and pure warrior. Consequently, the town of Tristram was no longer beset by the murderous abominations of Hell, and the

settlement became peaceful and prosperous once more. However, this era of serenity lasted but a few years. The hero, no longer able to resist the power of Diablo, eventually succumbed to his malignant influence. He set off eastward from Tristram, corrupting the Sisters of the Sightless Eye and leaving a trail of death and destruction in his wake. Indigenous creatures, who once peacefully coexisted with humans, were twisted by the power of the Wanderer (as he came to be known) and turned on those unfortunate enough to encounter them. Corpses rose from their graves, forming a veritable army of the undead which roamed the wilderness in search of prey. As the Wanderer continued east, his intentions became clear. The tomb of Tal Rasha near the desert city of Lut Gholein was known to be the prison of Diablo's brother, Baal. Were Diablo to succeed in releasing Baal and his other brother, Mephisto, the combined power of the three Prime Evils would destroy the entire world.

Adopting the role of the Amazon, Barbarian, Sorceress, Paladin or Necromancer, the player must travel eastward from the besieged Rogue Encampment in a bid to thwart Diablo's plan to release his brothers and invoke

Armageddon. The Amazon is somewhat similar to the Rogue from the original game in that she is very proficient with a bow, but Amazons are also particularly adept in the art of throwing spears, javelin and the like. Ranged combat is the Amazon's forte, but she is equally skilled in melee combat, and can wield every weapon type, making her a very versatile character. Even better suited to players with a taste for close combat is the Barbarian - a colossal warrior whose immense physical prowess allows him to wade through hordes of foes, dispatching them with ease. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the Sorceress, who relies solely on her extensive repertoire of offensive and defensive spells to survive.



Lightning spells are devastating

RUN AWAY! RUN AWAY!

The simple addition of the run key has completely altered Diablo II's gameplay dynamic. It is now possible to escape hordes of adversaries with ease, allowing the player to regenerate their health and mana before returning to the fray. Some spells are also enhanced by the use of the run key. The Sorceress' Blaze spell creates a wall of fire wherever she goes- running around to create a circle of flame, then standing in the centre forces monsters who wish to attack the player to sustain damage in the process.



The cinematic impact of Diablo II's cut scenes is unmatched



The blood of vanquished foes flows freely



The Paladin's auras punish encroachers

The Paladin strikes an interesting balance between the fighting and magic-based classes, using brute strength to cut down enemies and his multitude of auras to aid comrades and hobble opponents. The final character choice is the Necromancer, whose mastery of the black arts enables him to raise undead creatures to do his bidding. Traversing tracts of wilderness with skeletons, zombies and golems in tow is an especially appealing practice for the Necromancer. And, as if he wasn't creepy enough already, he is also able to cast a host of particularly insidious spells based on poisons and leeching agents.

L33t skillz

While Diablo II is, at its core, an action-oriented RPG, Blizzard have introduced some interesting new features that improve greatly on the existing Diablo formula. When the player's character increases one experience level, they are awarded a single Skill Point in addition to the standard five Stat Points offered in the original. Each character has a number of skill trees, similar

to tech trees from RTS games, which allow them to specialise in various combat and spell areas. The Sorceress, for example, has one skill tree for each of the elemental spell types- fire, ice and lightning. Spending a single skill point on a number of skills increases the range of skills available to that character, while spending several skill points on a single skill increases the efficiency of that skill, permitting that character to become a master of that skill. Each skill falls into the active or passive category. Active skills include the Necromancer's Summon Skeleton spell, and must be activated with a click of the second mouse button. On the other hand, passive skills are in effect at almost all times. The Amazon's Critical Strike grants the player an increased chance to inflict double damage with each hit-an exceedingly useful, if not essential, skill indeed.

The dizzying array of monster species inhabiting each of Diablo II's four chapters pales into insignificance in comparison to the almost infinite quantity of weapons and armour available to the player. In addition to



The Barbarian decimates a band of Leapers

THE RESURRECTION

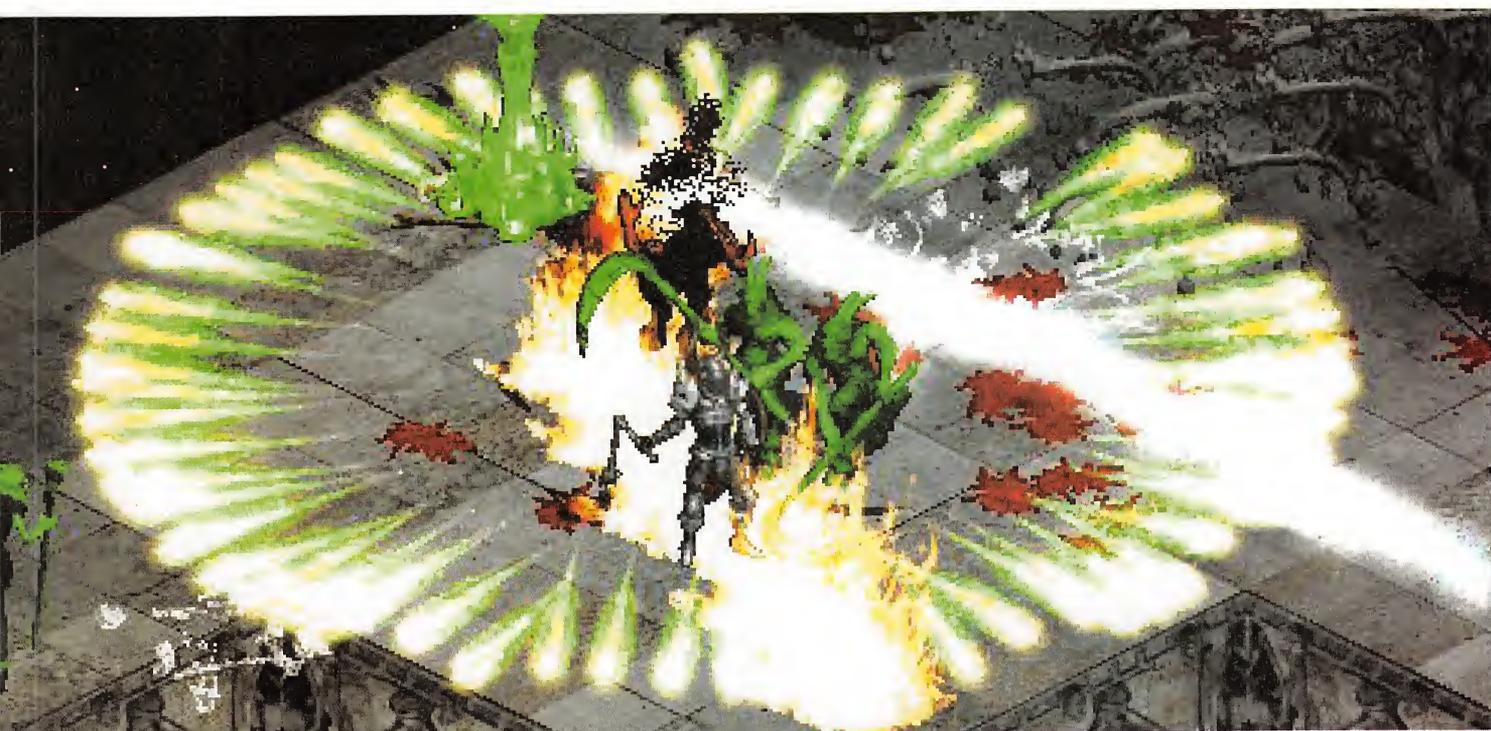
To make life a little more difficult for Diablo veterans, Blizzard have created a new class of monster with respawning abilities. These creatures are generally more powerful than their run-of-the-mill brethren, and are able to resurrect them at an astounding rate. Targeting these nuisances with powerful spells or special attacks at the outset of battle is paramount to victory over the ravenous scourge.

a multitude of auras to aid comrades and hobble opponents

the thousands of randomly-generated Rare and Unique items, item Sets have been included. These introduce a Pokemon-esque collection mentality to the proceedings. Once the property of great champions and heroes, the Sets consist of several exceptionally powerful pieces of armour, as well as a weapon able to inflict heavy damage. Individual set items possess certain magical enchantments that add to their effectiveness in battle, and increase the player's resistance to certain elemental attacks. Although finding every item in a Set is very difficult, there is an added incentive for doing so. When every item in a set is



Holy attacks spell doom for the undead



Salamanders spit debilitating ice orbs



Dynamic lighting at its best



Though slow, zombies pack a punch



equipped, an additional magical bonus is bestowed upon the player, making complete Sets some truly valuable assets.

Bringing even greater variety to the seemingly limitless number of items are those equipped with sockets. These weapons, shields and helmets can be fitted with rare gems that grant the player the ability to inflict elemental damage, resist elemental damage and increase the player's statistics respectively. The quality of gems corresponds directly to their effectiveness when socketed, so that a sword with a chipped ruby added to it will inflict relatively minor fire damage, but the same sword enhanced with a perfect ruby will deliver significantly

increased fire damage. An added bonus of Rare, Unique, Gemmed and Set items is the fact that many of them feature unique graphics that make the player's character look even more formidable, and advertise the fact that the player has discovered some especially powerful items.

Battle.net bottleneck

Unfortunately, at the time of writing, multiplayer Diablo II is all but inaccessible. In spite of the Battle.net stress test, the four global servers are severely overloaded, and achieving an acceptable ping rate on a 56K modem is all but impossible. Even those blessed with a cable connection will find the going tough. One could very reasonably assume that the US Battle.net servers would be the most crowded, but this is clearly not the case. The games market within South Korea accounts for an enormous percentage of the worldwide market, making access to the Asia server located there even more difficult for Australians. Sadly, the likelihood of Australia receiving its own Battle.net server is slim indeed.

In order to maximise market penetration, Blizzard ensured that Diablo II could run quite comfortably on low end

systems. As such, the in-game resolution is restricted to a rather archaic 640x480pixels. Players with Athlon 800's and 21-inch monitors will yearn for the option to crank the resolution up to a far more respectable 1024x768, but the game is surprisingly picturesque in its current state. Dungeons appear suitably dank, with dynamic lighting lending to the apprehension the player feels as they try to make out the shadowy forms lurking at the periphery of their vision.

Similarly, the wilderness areas are liberally sprinkled with native vegetation and feel quite expansive. Although a 3D accelerator is by no means essential, spell effects are beefed up significantly when an accelerator is present, adding to their visual impact. Diablo II's audio is equally impressive, with convincing character and NPC voices immersing the player within the game world and fleshing out the plot perfectly. The piercing screams of monsters as they writhe in their death throes is also quite chilling, making for an altogether pleasurable aural experience. The game's FMV sequences are absolutely mind blowing in their beauty, and their cinematic quality sets them apart from the uninspired drivel that usually accompanies most games.

ARE YOU HARDCORE?

Multiple difficulty levels and randomised maps make this one game that can be played through to its dramatic conclusion many times over. When the player begins the campaign for the first time, the difficulty is automatically set to Normal, but when Diablo and his minions have been defeated, it's possible to play through the game again in Nightmare and Hell modes. At these difficulty levels, enemies have increased health levels and much more powerful attacks. Balancing this out is the fact that the player is rewarded with even rarer and more powerful items for defeating them. For those looking for an even greater challenge, Blizzard offers an interesting Battle.net mode appropriately called Hardcore. In this mode, the player has one life and one life only. Death means starting the campaign from the very beginning, regardless of whether the player's character is at experience level 5 or 75. Unfortunately, death as a result of lag seems just as probable as death at the hands of a foe. Thus, with Blizzard unable to restore the lives of those killed off by lag, this may be one mode that's all but useless until the Battle.net server situation is resolved.



The Amazon's Poison Javelin spews a cloud of rancid gas



10 free spins

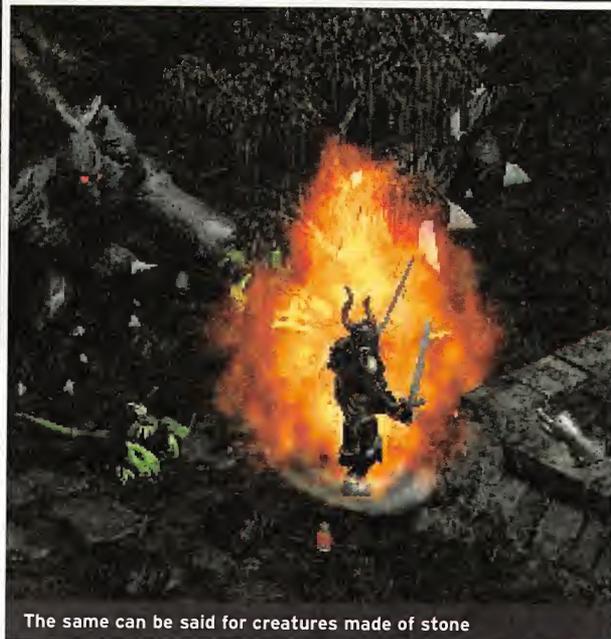
Though some would consider such a view to be somewhat cynical, at it's most basic level, Diablo II can be likened to one of the NSW Government's favourite money spinners - the not-so-humble poker machine.

This analogy is certainly not as abstract as it would initially seem. It could be argued that the hundreds of thousands of players across the globe are fervently playing Diablo II for its compelling plot and an innate desire to defeat the embodiment of Evil. But it seems far more likely that the vast majority of players are enamoured by the possibility that the next monster they vanquish could well be the one that triggers the jackpot. The monster whose corpse yields an item that is inimitable in its rarity, power and beauty and, quite possibly, worth \$5000 on Ebay. It is this insurmountable addictive quality that will see the player opting to clear out "just one more dungeon" at 4am on a weekday, and it is this aspect that will assuredly contribute to a worldwide increase in the exasperation of infinitely patient partners and spouses.

Whatever the reason for its unprecedented popularity, Diablo II will



Fire-spewing beasts are all but immune to flames



The same can be said for creatures made of stone

certainly not disappoint. Newcomers will appreciate the game's simplicity and longevity, while reformed Diablo addicts will appreciate its subtle refinements and improved gameplay depth.

Diablo II is no Planescape Torment, but then again, it doesn't try to be. Nor did its creators intend it to be. But it is, without a doubt, one of the greatest hack 'n' slash RPG's of all time.

Brett Robinson



Fry!

PCPP

FOR

- More than four times the size of the original
- Many times better
- Fantastic longterm value
- Includes some stunning cutscenes

AGAINST

- Gameplay can become repetitive
- No Australian Battle.net server!

OVERALL

It is the successor to Diablo - need I say more?

89%

WARTORN

Another month, another realtime strategy game discovers 3D

DETAILS

GENRE

3D Realtime Strategy

MULTIPLAYER

Yes (1-8 via TCP/IP, Modem, Serial, IPX)

DEVELOPER

Eyst

PUBLISHER

Eyst

DISTRIBUTOR

Ozisoft

AVAILABLE

TBA

RATING

TBA

NEED

P-200, 32Mb RAM, 3D Videocard (D3D)

WANT

PII-233, 64Mb RAM



A shortage of camouflage paint made the base an easy target

As if almost by way of tradition, the computer gaming fraternity has been divided down the middle when it comes to 2D and 3D games. Firstperson shooters, racing and flight sims have delivered all the 3D action and excitement of fully immersive gameplay. While roleplaying, strategy and platform based games have held rein over the 2D environment.

A genre breaking down this dimensional wall is realtime strategy. Dogs of War, Ground Control, and Warzone 2100 are a few of the titles to have already offered a taste (both good and bad) of what 3D RTS games are all about. We need look no further than local Woy Woy based company Eyst, who have also been working on such a game as far back as late '97. On how the game WarTorn was first conceived, managing director, **Ben Moss** said, "When the idea for the game came about, a 3D RTS game hadn't been released yet. One of the key things we were trying to achieve was to bring together all the elements of what we liked about RTS games at the time, plus what we wanted to add to it. The big thing for us was the configurability of the game. I wanted to give players the flexibility and options that I

always wanted in other RTS games, particularly multiplayer features." Well, two and a half years later, the team from Eyst has cleared a big enough hole in that wall to show us just how 2D games should really be played... That is, in full 3D.



huge prizes in specially constructed battle arenas, where the action is then televised. By popular vote these tournaments are thrashed out between two or more countries, using a selection of weapons and units from the 20th century. From there, teams

offering players the chance to custom design units from the chassis up

WarTorn Tournament

The story behind WarTorn is thankfully not the typical Earth vs Aliens slugfest or save the world from nuclear holocaust scenario. Instead, the year is 2999AD (okay, so it's not completely original), at which point the Earth has experienced centuries as a peaceful and warless society. The only problem is, the population has become restless and bored with regular sporting and entertainment events, and the time had come for something exciting, something new, something like... controlled war! The idea being, 32 countries are selected to compete against each other for

must head out into the field collecting resources, building units, and surviving heated battles.

Single battles can be played out in either a Skirmish mode for instant action style battles that require little to no management and feature unlimited ammunition, or a Full Strategy mode which requires management of resources and development of units. And finally, a Tournament can be selected giving players the full option of playing a series of games consecutively. A world ladder serves to update players on their current ranking, games played, wins, losses, and overall

ONLINE

www.wartorn.com/
The official home for the game



www.eyst.com
The developer's official site





A SAM finds its target



Rioting in Fiji was visible from afar



Artillery units deliver their devastating payloads



Individual units stats are highly detailed



An early casualty of war



The Attack Planner is overly complicated



Customs seized the counterfeit artworks

score. The four types of games include all out war, hunter and the hunted, capture the flag, and turnbased. However an advanced set of options allow for almost unlimited variations on these game settings to suit the player's own preferences.

Edit everything

Clearly one of the most important components of any strategy game is team units, and since this particular theatre of war is dealt across land, sea and air, a wide variety of standard unit types are available. One of WarTorn's key features is the design centre, offering players the chance to custom design units from the chassis up. This makes it possible to alter such options as the size of a tank's turret, the strength of armour on a bomber plane, or even the type of engine and fuel a patrol boat uses. Each customised unit can then be saved, making it available for future use. Base

management makes up another key element of the game, and while players can disable this option, its presence provides that extra factor of strategy to manage.

Two other unique tools within the game are the Formation Editor and the Attack Planner. Again, these can be completely ignored during a battle, but in doing so players miss the full sense of control that's available. The Formation Editor allows for the creation of customisable unit formations, in almost any configuration. The idea being, once a command has been sent, selected units will remain in formation as they head into battle, offering players absolute control in situations such as ambushes. The Attack Planner is also a specialised tool, used in creating accurate waypoints. Not only can they be triggered to activate at predetermined times, but also viewed with ETA and elapsed time information.

Choreography

A key feature of the game that may take some getting used to is the camera controls. Being a 3D environment, the developer has given players unlimited realtime control of camera angles and movement. This makes it possible to do anything from zoom out for a full battlefield view, to right in close to the heart of a battle. Once mastered however, they soon prove indispensable controls in holding a commanding position.

The multiplayer side of things has been well catered for with TCP/IP, IPX, modem and serial connections. Players contact and connect up with others through the ingame WarTorn Lobby, which offers up to eight players per game the same options as a single player, plus two types of cooperative modes, where players can share the management tasks, or even have separate bases but share all other resources.

Ultimately, WarTorn's strength lies in its "everything bar the kitchen sink" approach to game options, which will be warmly received by hardcore RTS gamers, but could easily prove more than a little daunting for the mass of casual gamers. Which would be a shame as it's a 100% homegrown product, and that's reason enough to give this first rate effort from a team of local lads on the north coast of New South Wales a serious look.

Mike Wilcox

PCPP

FOR

- Proud step forward in 3D RTS games
- More options that one could ever hope for

AGAINST

- Prepare for a steep learning curve
- Daunting for beginners

OVERALL

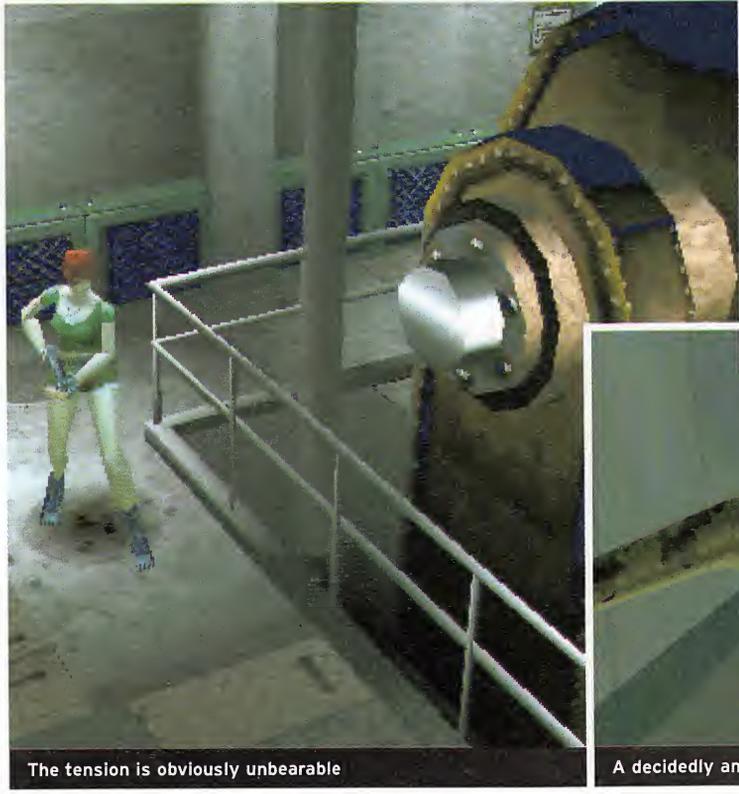
Complex strategy that lacks a bit of user-friendliness

78%

DINO CRISIS

More fuel to the PC vs Console fire? Shrug, we say...

DETAILS	
GENRE	Survival Action
MULTIPLAYER	No
DEVELOPER	Capcom
PUBLISHER	Virgin
DISTRIBUTOR	Ozisoft
AVAILABLE	Now
RATING	M
NEED	PII-300, 32Mb RAM
WANT	PIII-450, 64Mb RAM



The tension is obviously unbearable



This guy seems rather perturbed



A decidedly amorous raptor

ONLINE

www.capcom.com
The console master's official site

www.survivalhorror.com
Devoted to other games in the genre

www.evilgaming.net
Not for kids, it's too scary, okay?

There's something unsettling about consoles to sections of the PC gaming community. As an example, take the endless and frankly tiresome debate that rages in the letters pages of this very publication - mostly consisting of: "I'm very hardcore, I have a PC" or "My mate's a total slapper, he's got an N64".

Whether you're hardcore or a slapper, gamers can't deny that consoles offer something that PCs do not. Entirely more accessible, high speed, arcade-beautiful gaming. And besides, if consoles were so inferior, why do we get so many letters in defence of the all-powerful PC? I can only suspect that secret jealousies abound amongst some of the PC gaming community.

Any reasonable human being would realise that it's a case of horses for courses.



While consoles offer engaging action, they are useless for word processing or anything else. On the other side, PCs offer a wide variety of gaming options but - hell - you have to deal with Windows. That's where it should really end, I suppose. Except that some bright marketing spark decided that console games might work well on PC. Hmm...

Cranking cogs

Capcom's Dino Crisis is the latest title to have weathered the porting to PC from PlayStation. In theory it is quite a solid idea, as the survival horror game ventures into PC action adventuring territory. The problem is that there has been little to no effort put into the conversion process. Rumour has it a port from PC to Dreamcast can take only a day. It is pretty hard to see how any more time was spent on this. It's a pity because Dino Crisis, in its natural environment, is a near perfect example of the survival blood-fests that have been so popular on the PlayStation.

The thing that makes

these games great is that they are paced like the best horror films - giving the gamer long periods of tense anticipation, even some laughs, and just when you don't expect it, some bloody great scares. Add to this the unfolding of a sinister (if not spectacular) narrative and you have all the ingredients for strong entertainment.

The story concerns a secret military facility on Ibis Island. You play Regina, a foxy young thing sent in as part of a military unit to find the mysterious Dr. Kirk. The place is empty until the members of your unit are picked off, one by one, by ravenous dinosaurs. The cogs start turning in your beautiful but rather numb head: "There's definitely something WRONG here". (And CUT! Regina that was fabulous! - Ed.) Thus the scene is set for much brandishing of weapons, eerie silences and, above all, some dinosaur feeding.

Now that's acting

The basics work in Dino Crisis on the PC. That level of fear and anticipation is there, with the frenzied raptors putting in a stellar performance. Rather than the static backgrounds seen in Capcom's earlier Resident Evil, the camera moves with you in Dino Crisis and to wonderful effect. The dynamic camera angles make for some

SCARY CINEMATICS

The atmosphere of Dino Crisis is created by the scripted cutscenes like this one. It's Jurassic Park all over again.



Regina provides some mind-blowing insights



Rule one: don't back yourself into...



...a corner. D'oh!

especially scary sequences, although it's annoying that at times you find yourself shooting at an off-screen dinosaur. The controls use the keyboard and (happily) can be remapped offering you a small level of customisation unseen in other ports. It is on this basis that the game is playable.

raptors put in a stellar performance

The game relies on the heritage of B-grade horror and action films for some of its entertainment value. The dialogue is so appallingly contrived that you just have to laugh. Though not quite as bad as the legendary Resident Evil, Dino Crisis still has its share of shockers:

Rick: "I have a bad FEELING about this..."

Regina: "We're attacked by a big-ass lizard!"

Dino Crisis maintains a lot of fun in this way, combining thrills and (perhaps

unintentional) humour. Indeed, all the hallmarks of this style of Capcom game are present. Intermittent save points are scattered throughout the game, this time seemingly unlimited in comparison to the restrictions imposed by other titles. Also there's the opportunity to mix different

health "potions" to bring new and different effects. And you can pause to the options and inventory screen at any time in the game.

One puzzling aspect is the fact that there is no life bar for Regina anywhere, on screen or in her inventory. She can be walking around clutching her arm and bleeding but it's never clear how close she is to death. In games like this, where conservation of ammo and health are of paramount importance, it's an oversight.



Like any good heroine, Regina keeps a hairbrush handy for the close-ups

FINE ANGLES

In each location, the camera is "on rails" following Regina. It is quite unnerving as you wonder what is watching you from this point of view.



Half an arse

Another questionable part of Dino Crisis is that you need to step through a doorway every time that you move to a new area (the PlayStation's loading smokescreen). The PC has the capabilities to avoid devices like this that chop up the action and dissipate the atmosphere, so why weren't they exploited? I keep thinking about Dino Crisis on PC as it compares to a PlayStation experience and finding myself dissatisfied. Not because the game is substandard, but due to the half-arsed effort put into conversion. The curious deserve better, as these Capcom titles are strong games and there is no reason why they couldn't be better on PC than on PlayStation.

As it stands, the worst that the PlayStation has to offer becomes blindingly obvious when its games are converted to PC: low resolutions and therefore inferior visuals, a lack of customised options that we PC gamers are so used to and, in this case, loading breaks every five seconds. If someone spent a little more time with these ports to implement some improvements (like upping the resolution from a meagre 640x480) then they wouldn't feel like such a brazen attempt to cash in on a strong, marketable name.

Scary action but a sub-standard offering nonetheless. Dino Crisis is certainly playable. But if you must have it, buy the PlayStation version instead - at least you'll see the game fully pushing the machine to its limits.

John Dewhurst

PCPP

FOR

- Thrills
- Laughs
- Blood

AGAINST

- Ugly low-res
- Limited options
- Painful load times

OVERALL

Nice game, but shame about the conversion

68%

METAL FATIGUE

Tired of tanks? Here's an RTS that throws up a few robotic twists

DETAILS

GENRE

Realtime Strategy

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

DEVELOPER

Zono Inc.

PUBLISHER

Take 2 Interactive

DISTRIBUTOR

Jack of All Games

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

TBA

NEED

P-200, 32Mb RAM,
60Mb HDD, 4xCD,
4Mb 3D Videocard

WANT

PII-300, 64Mb RAM,
385Mb HDD, 8xCD,
8Mb 3D Video card
(D3D)



Combots are the mainstay of each faction's forces



Sword-wielding combots charge into battle

ONLINE

www.metal-fatigue.net
Metal Fatigue's
home page



www.mplayer.com/gamers/strategy/metal_fatigue
Where the multiplayer
action is, or will be



www.zono.com
A site showcasing the
game's developers



Any rabid gamer playing Metal Fatigue would instantly recognise its pedigree. The graphics, unit types and storyline all have their roots in PC history's long list of popular realtime strategy games, including MechCommander, Ground Control, Dark Reign and Command & Conquer.

This is not, I must admit, a bad thing - most titles in the genre bear remarkably similar characteristics, such as rapid resource procurement, upgrading units and mass unit manufacture. Developer Zono Inc. has incorporated these attributes and combined them with a three tier battlefield in one big 'bot battling bonanza!

Digging holes

The first noticeable feature that differentiates Metal Fatigue from its RTS peers is the incorporation of a three level world, with Orbital, Surface and Underground layers. Use of the Orbital level is mainly restricted to sun-ray harnessing, although the small floating asteroids do provide protection (through remoteness) for some key structures, such as the Research facility. The Surface, on the other hand, is textured in an array of tile-sets somewhat reminiscent of Warzone 2100 and the new Ground Control. Altitude changes are

readily recognisable and play an active role in line-of-sight determination and fog of war. Here, small lava pools can be mined by Hover Trucks to gain most of the available resources; larger pools, however, are commonly found beneath the surface. While there are some tunnels Underground, Drill Trucks can be used to create more or to excavate open expanses to house structures. These dark passages can be used to mount surprise attacks against the enemy - unless they're underground too...

While Metal Fatigue does have the standard RTS corps of resource gatherers, scout tanks, heavy tanks, aircraft and artillery etc. (though not, unfortunately, the long-range weaponry from Dark Reign), it does sport the 'Combot,' a robotic BattleMech-ish unit which distinguishes the game from most other titles in the genre. Compared to the Combot, all of the other military units generally play a supporting role during combat as they are dwarfed by the 'bots sheer size, firepower and spectacle - although these units are too big to go Underground. These machines are constructed piecemeal from a selection of arms, legs and torsos at the local Assembly Plant, allowing for an incredible variety of Combots to suit almost every occasion.

We can rebuild you

Each CorpoNation has its own flavour of Combot components. The religious Neuropa, for example, has access to GRP Cammo Torsos - providing a stealth mode for its 'bots and immediately adjacent units. The Mil-Agro, however, can use Gatling Guns and Flak Torsos instead, as well as many others. Combots armed with Axe Arms, Katanas or Laser Swords can sever limbs from enemies during hand-to-hand melee, the pieces then salvaged by the Hover Trucks and researched back at base. A 'bot may even exchange or replace lost limbs with enemy technologies in the field!





The AI is partial to rush tactics



One-on-one fights are compelling



Fights become quite hectic when you have to monitor three tiers of gameplay



Large units are highly detailed



A wider view of the battlefield

The crisp graphics and animations add to the lustre of 'bot battles. These behemoths fight much as their human pilots do - they knee, deflect, punch and slice each other with great abandon. With a floating camera and zoom similar to Myth, it is possible to watch the brawls up close - if you have time. The battles are almost constant and, with the other two new levels of play, pretty hard to keep in control. I wanted to launch a sneaky Underground attack with a horde of artillery (who are great Underground by the way) on my not-quite-so-hapless opponent but I had to change views constantly to command defending units on the Surface.

Unfortunately, the combat process in Metal Fatigue is further complicated by a number of factors, all of which place you at a disadvantage. The first problem is simply the high degree of debris - with limbs and other body parts constantly erupting all over the place, it is difficult to get a clean view of the

action to control your units. Actually selecting a unit from a group is also a trying task as there is no StarCraft-style toolbar to help you select your intended target.

Sole survivor

While Metal Fatigue is an appealing game, it does have its faults. Zono has been boasting about the various AI options within the game - although I didn't really notice any particularly remarkable feats of strategic brilliance from the computer during single-play. To its credit, I did notice some tactical withdrawals - a very rare feature in most RTS games. Unfortunately, tank-rushes aren't so rare, as I witnessed many such attempts at my bases during the campaigns.

The other aspect that really concerned me was the need for extreme unit micro-management. One notable example is when I used a Hover Truck to grab a discarded limb from the ground. After it had picked it

THE CORPONATIONS

The differences between each of the CorpoNations mainly influence play at the beginning of the game, as recycled parts from enemy players tend to even things out at later stages of the game. The Rimtech CorpoNation (Blue) are basically the good guys, the boy scouts who want humankind to be happy and in peace. They are initially disturbed at the rising conflict between the three CoproNations and are forced to join in the struggle. After all, with access to the latest technologies, discipline is much easier to maintain. They can are equally adept at either Energy or Kinetic (physical/missile) based weapons/equipment and they tend to have much more finesse than their more aggressive counterparts. The Mil-Agro CorpoNation (Red), on the other hand, are the brutes who win by sheer determination. To keep their underlings in check, the leaders of this CorpoNation use brainwashing techniques and microchip implants to subjugate them (like in recent Buffy episodes!). Kinetic weapons, such as the Gatling Gun, Howitzers and Carpet Bombs are more their cup of tea. Of course, long-range weapons are for the meek and mild so axe-wielding hand-to-hand combat is definitely the preferred method of aggravation. On the more weird side are the Neuropa (Green). This CorpoNation is the most spiritual of the three - they view technology with an almost religious fervour, favouring Energy weapons with their attentions. Their favourite mode of attack is to whittle down the enemy from long-range and then move in to crush them underfoot. These guys look more alien than the others and, as a consequence, have the coolest looking combots!



replace lost limbs with enemy technologies in the field

up, it simply stood there until you told it to drop it off at the Assembly Plant. Similarly, a Hover Truck will not repair adjacent units while sitting around doing very little. Luckily, Metal Fatigue has a shortcut key (there are shortcut keys for almost everything imaginable!) to locate inactive Hover Trucks - much in the same manner as Age of Kings. There are also some problems with the pathfinding, with units tending to have difficulties walking around each other.

While I played a heap of single-player scenarios of Metal Fatigue, I didn't get much multiplayer action. As MF has only just hit the world market, the number of people playing online is notably few - I was the only person on the MF Mplayer.com site! Zono has added a heap of multiplayer scenarios to keep gamers happy. Unfortunately, they have not thrown in a map editor as yet, but let's hope one will be available in the near future.

However Metal Fatigue does seem to borrow a lot of features from its RTS predecessors, yet new innovations and concepts begin to show as the game progresses. The high difficulty and lengthy scenarios will be enough to keep most strategy gamers happy.

Ryan Hovingsh

PCPP

FOR

- Unique features
- Excellent 3D terrain
- Very nice combat graphics
- Large scenarios
- Shortcut keys by the thousand!

AGAINST

- Heavy micro-management
- Combat gets hectic
- Scenarios tend to lack variety

OVERALL

An innovative game that ever-so nearly succeeds

76%

KLINGON ACADEMY

"Today Is A Good Day To Make Cupcakes"

DETAILS

GENRE

Walking Throw Rugs In Space

MULTIPLAYER

Yes (1-6 via LAN/TCP)

DEVELOPER

14 Degrees East

PUBLISHER

Interplay

DISTRIBUTOR

Interplay

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

M

NEED

P-233, 64Mb RAM, 8Mb 3D Videocard, 12xCD

WANT

P11-500, 128Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D Videocard, 32xCD



Major space stations are imposing sights



Enterprise destroyed, sir



Beating a hasty retreat

ONLINE

www.interplay.com/klingson
The official KA site



www.14degrees.com
Interplay's strategy division and the developer of KA



www.federationhq.net/klingson
Here you will find all manner of mods and info for Klingon Academy. The best fan site around for this game so far



Or so said the last Klingon Emperor just before he died in the arms of his court veterinarian. What a strange thing it is to be so familiar with a fictional alien race from a fictional future! Scourge of Captains Kirk, Picard and Sisko, these furry warriors are easily the most popular alien race in the Trek franchise, closely followed by the Borg of course, and an obvious subject for a game of interstellar warfare.

Some have unkindly described Klingons as "squashed Mars Bar heads" or even "walking throw rugs", but any fictional character with real life university courses in its language and culture must have some sort of charm and, after the disappointing Starfleet Academy, Interplay is banking on it for success.

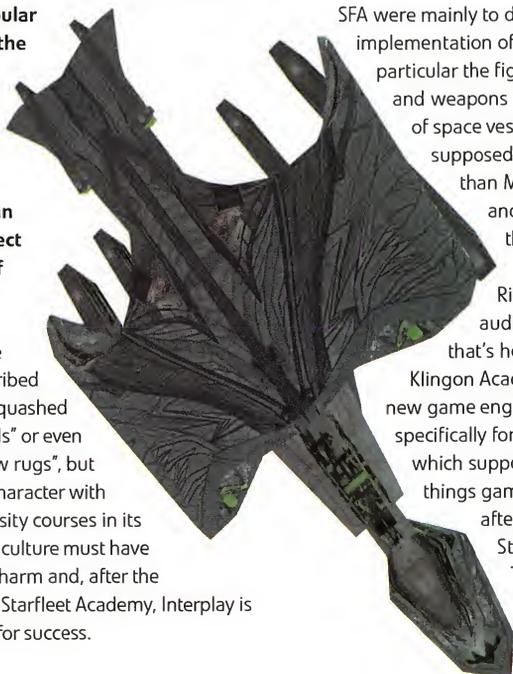
Phasers and photons

When taken in context with Starfleet Academy, the new Klingon version is a vast improvement in terms of technology and game design, and has managed to overcome almost all the criticisms made of its predecessor. The major problems with

SFA were mainly to do with the implementation of combat, in particular the fighter plane flight and weapons characteristics of space vessels which are supposed to be bigger than Mike Tyson's ego and heavier than the combined weight of a Ricky Lake audience - and that's heavy.

Klingon Academy boasts a new game engine designed specifically for the job, one which supports many of the things gamers wished for after playing

Starfleet Academy. The feel of the game is now much more



Shields activated

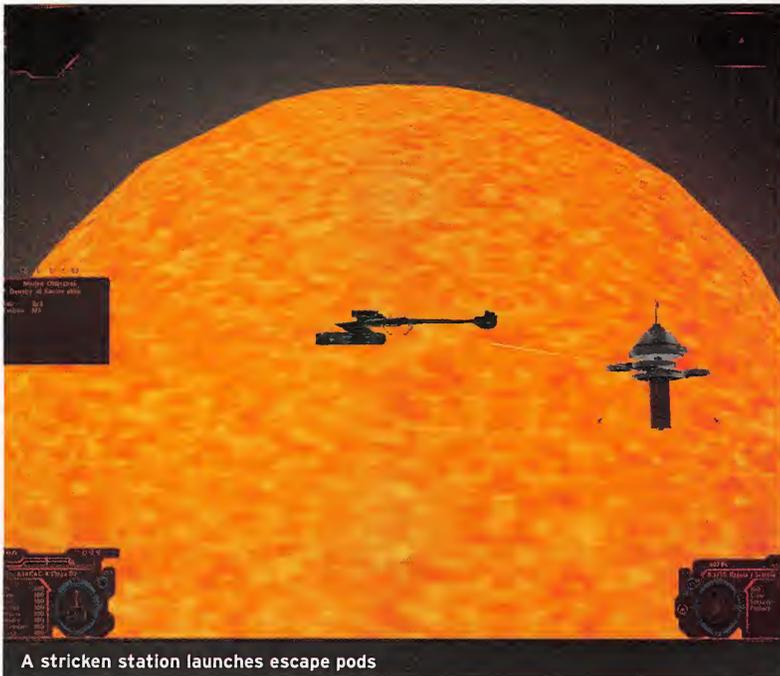
accurate with the speed and manoeuvrability of the vessels more in line with the nature of their size and mass. Unlike SFA it is now possible to fire in all directions around your vessel using the new gunnery control chair. Standing orders can be given to the helm crew to fly your ship while you blast away at the enemy with Phasers, Photon Torps and Plasma weapons. Which all look authentic as depicted in the Original Series Trek films.

Many of the graphic effects have in fact been copied from the special effects seen in the 2nd, 3rd and 6th Trek films, which should

SOME FINE ACTING



Interplay has a tradition of using extensive FMV in its Trek titles and Klingon Academy is no exception. Both Christopher Plummer and David Warner reprise their roles as the Shakespeare quoting General Chang and Chancellor Gorkon respectively, and do a damn good job! It is very easy to see the difference between amateurs and professionals when you see the convincing, stirring speeches given by Plummer and compare them to the laughable efforts in other games, particularly those of Westwood.



A stricken station launches escape pods

chuck Klingon brown-eyes through your viewscreen at those Federation pansies

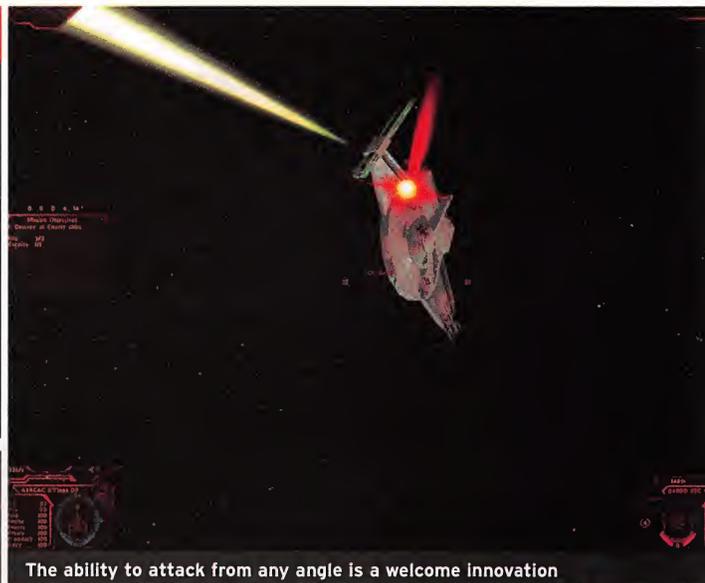
delight fans as much as they did me. Rather than just seeing a flash of yellow when your weapons fire hits there are actually a whole host of visual effects that can occur. You can blow holes right through the 'Saucer Section' of federation vessels and see stars through them; blast their warp nacelles into a million pieces; see exposed decks where hull sections have been sheared off; and chuck massive Klingon brown-eyes through your view screen to really put those Federation pansies in their place.

The real strength of the game though is in its' in depth mission design, this is not a Trek version of Starlancer. The player has a huge range of systems at their disposal, and they aren't there just for show. You will have to master intuitive control of shield systems, transporters, tractor beams, ECM and repair teams to defeat the sometimes impossible odds, and have a big hairy pair of Klingon cahoonas to boot.

All patched up

As with almost every game this complex there are some technical problems with the final code. I experienced audio drop outs occasionally (using an SB Live) and sometimes speech samples will play repeatedly three or four times which can become a bit annoying. More seriously, the AI governing wingmen behaviour almost always flies them into planets if they get too close - well, they're only dumb Klingons after all. And enemies have a nasty tendency to fly in a suicidal fashion, ramming your ship in the process. There is also a strange pause effect when orders are given to your wingmen and when other ships warp into or out of a star system.

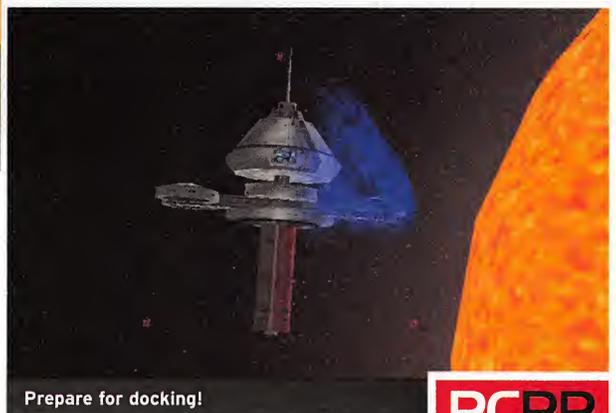
If you have access to the net (or next month's CD PowerPlay), you can actually overcome these problems with the 1.01 patch available on Interplay's website. The patch is extensive and fixes all the major



The ability to attack from any angle is a welcome innovation

SPEAK KLINGON

If you feel like wasting some serious time and money on something that will be as useful to you as a nuclear powered toothbrush you can enrol at the Klingon Language Institute <http://www.kli.org/> Don't laugh, their site gets 500 hits a day, not bad for a non-existent language!



Prepare for docking!

deficiencies in the game. It fixes the pause problem, adjusts the enemy AI to make them less suicidal, allows you to start from any CD (another problem with the original code is that you have to boot from CD2), fixes problems with a few of the missions and generally makes the game much more fun to play.

Klingon Academy is a unique and challenging space shooter for Trek fans and indeed anyone interested in tactical combat rather than the usual test of reflexes that most space shooters represent. The only thing it really lacks is a local version of Mplayer to allow Aussie Klingons to play online without the enormous lag that exists on the US version of that service.

George Soropos

PCPP

FOR

- Great attention to detail
- Trek authenticity
- An atmospheric space shooter

AGAINST

- A bit rough around the edges
- Needs a patch to polish

OVERALL

Quality space combat with a Trekkie flavour

83%

SCORE LIST

The past year in gaming. This month we highlight racing games

GAME NAME SCORE # ISSUE



Castrol Superbikes 2000

12 O'Clock High	68	#46
Abomination	81	#44
● Age of Empires 2	94	#42
Age of Wonders	84	#46
Airport Inc.	42	#48
Akuma: Demospawn	50	#47
Alien Nations	75	#52
Allegiance	81	#50
Alpha Centauri: Alien X-fire	83	#45
Amerzone	68	#42
Army Men Air Tactics	65	#50
Army Men In Space	66	#48
Asheron's Call	88	#50

Castrol Superbikes 2000

DEVELOPER: Midas
PUBLISHER: Interactive Entertainment
DISTRIBUTOR: Playcorp
WHAT WE SAID THEN:
 "Remembering this is motorbike racing, driver positions change every corner, and to finish on top is an achievement, especially at tougher difficulty settings. Nothing is more fulfilling than crossing the finish line .02 seconds ahead of second place in a tightly contested battle."

85% in PCPP #42

Atlantis II	78	#50
BG: Sword Coast	76	#41
Battlecruiser 3000	72	#50
Battlezone 2	85	#48
Beetle Crazy Cup	74	#49
Braveheart	86	#42
● C&C Tiberian Sun	94	#41
Civ: Test of Time	81	#41
Clans	48	#42
Codename: Eagle	64	#46
Cricket 2000	70	#51
Croc 2	78	#48
Crusaders of Might & Magic	75	#50
Cutthroats	67	#43
Daikatana	67	#52
Dark Reign 2	89	#51
Darkstone	68	#42
Delta Force 2	78	#46
Descent 3: Mercenaries	65	#47
● Deus Ex	98	#51
Dick Johnson V8 Challenge	45	#46
Disciples	81	#43
Dogs of War	72	#51
Dracula	58	#47
Drakan	84	#43
Driver	71	#43
● Dungeon Keeper 2	90	#41
● Enemy Engaged	91	#50
Evolve	71	#50

F1 2000

DEVELOPER:
PUBLISHER:
DISTRIBUTOR:
WHAT WE SAID THEN:
 "Alas, EA has again come through with a product that lacks a soul. It would seem that they noticed a gap in the release schedule and decided to knock together a game to fill it. Dynamite in the field of expectations, but sadly lacking when it comes to the crunch, F1 2000 has bucket loads of potential that never made it to the release"

65% in PCPP #50

● F/A 18 Hornet	91	#47
FA Prem. League Stars	71	#42
FIFA 2000	88	#45
Fighting Steel	80	#41
Final Fantasy VIII	77	#47
Flight Unlimited III	89	#43
Fly!	85	#42
Flying Heroes	76	#51
● Force 21	90	#42
Force Commander	58	#49
Fox Sports NBA 2000	56	#44

Ford Racing

DEVELOPER: Empire Sports
PUBLISHER: Empire Interactive
DISTRIBUTOR: QV Software
WHAT WE SAID THEN:
 "An original concept in motor simulations, Ford Racing offers the chance to jump in any Ford vehicle - from the 97 Fiesta to the 2000 Mondeo- and compete ontrack. The physics modelling for each car is represented quite well...and the computer drivers are extremely aggressive. One of the best picks from the Arcade barrel"

72% in PCPP #48

● Freespace 2	95	#44
Gabriel Knight III	87	#44
Gorky 17	65	#47

GP 500

DEVELOPER: Beam Software
PUBLISHER: Microprose
DISTRIBUTOR: Hasbro Interactive
WHAT WE SAID THEN:
 "Whether you're a full-time bike junkie, a casual rider or just enjoy watching a race on the box, GP500 has something for you. Designed with both the expert and novice in mind, this title has set the benchmark for all future motorcycle sims, and proudly sits at the top of my list as the best motorcycle simulation to date."

96% in PCPP #43

Grand Prix World	83	#49
Grand Theft Auto 2	84	#44
● Ground Control	90	#52
Guardians of Darkness	30	#41
Gulf War: Desert Hammer	55	#45
Gunship!	89	#50
● Half-Life: Opposing Force	90	#45
HOMM III: Armageddon's Blade	70	#45
Hidden and Dangerous	88	#41
H & D: Fight for Freedom	45	#46
● Homeworld	95	#41
Icewind Dale	??	#52
I-War: Defiance	72	#44
● Imperium Galactica 2	92	#46
Indiana Jones & Infernal Machine	69	#45
Interstate '82	60	#47
Invictus	51	#48



GOLD AWARD
90-94

PLATINUM AWARD
95-100

Jagged Alliance 2	89	#42
Jane's USAF	86	#44
KA-52 Alligator	65	#48
King of Dragon Pass	31	#52
Kingpin	86	#41
Lemmings Revolution	70	#51
Links 2000	79	#44
M25 Racer	25	#45
Madden NFL 2000	84	#44
Majesty	79	#49
Man of War II	15	#40
Martian Gothic	57	#50
Maximum Flight	78	#52
MDK 2	84	#52
Messiah	89	#48
● Mig Alley	92	#42
Might & Magic VIII	55	#49
Millennium Racer	70	#50
Motocross Madness 2	85	#51
MS Flight Sim 2000	84	#44

Pro Pinball: Fantastic Journey	88	#47
Puma Street Soccer	75	#46
● Quake III: Arena	93	#45
● Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear	92	#44
Rally Championship 2000	88	#45

Rally Masters

DEVELOPER: Digital Illusions

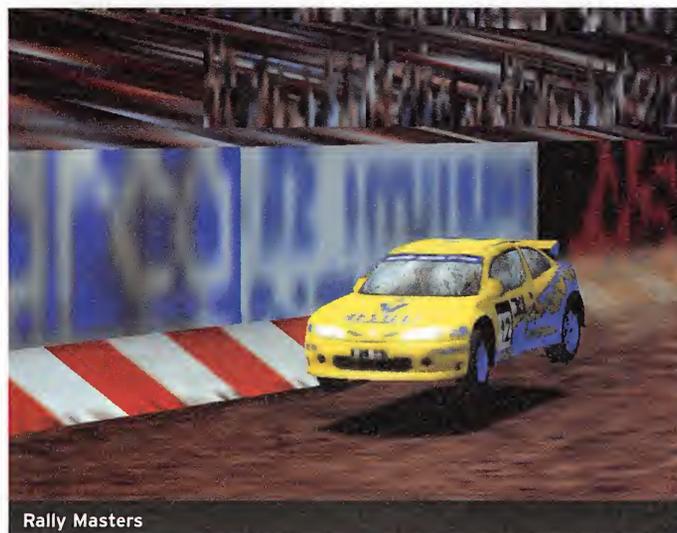
PUBLISHER: Infogrames

DISTRIBUTOR: Ozisoft

WHAT WE SAID THEN:

"Each car can be completely obliterated by over-aggressive driver. Collisions, scrapes and gut-wrenching flips all result in visible damage to the car, even where the vehicle is hardly recognisable when tortured to the extreme."

89% in PCPP #50



Rally Masters

Nascar 3

DEVELOPER: Papyrus

PUBLISHER: Sierra Sports

DISTRIBUTOR: Dataflow

WHAT WE SAID THEN:

"Nascar 3 boasts some impressive additions to the previous incarnation. Improved looks, beefy audio and big doses of realism make for another winning combination. Trying to navigate safely through a ten car pile up whilst completely blinded by a cacophony of screeching and tyre smoke has never been this much fun!"

89% in PCPP #44

Rayman 2	89	#45
Re-Volt	82	#41
Revenant	82	#45
Rising Sun	82	#48
Rogue Spear	92	#44
Rollcage II	80	#50
R'coaster Tyc: Added Attractions	81	#45
Septerra Core	84	#47
Seven Kingdoms 2	86	#44
Shadow Company	74	#44
Shadow Watch	65	#49
Shadow Man	61	#41
● Shogun: Total War	92	#50
● The Sims	90	#47
Skydive!	12	#42
Slave Zero	55	#47
Soldier of Fortune	86	#49

Nascar Revolution	35	#48
Nascar Road Racing	28	#41
Nations: Fighter Command	82	#44
NBA Inside Drive 2000	68	#46
NBA Live 2000	90	#45
Need for Speed: High Stakes	89	#41
Need For Speed: Porsche 2000	75	#52
Nerf Arena	70	#46
NHL Championship 2000	78	#46
Nocturne	79	#46
Nox	83	#48
● Omikron: Nomad Soul	93	#44
Operation Art of War 2	84	#42
Pandora's Box	68	#47
Panzer Elite	85	#46
● Planescape: Torment	91	#46
Pharaoh	88	#45
Phoenix	64	#46
Prince of Persia 3D	65	#43

Sega Rally 2

DEVELOPER: Sega PC

PUBLISHER: Sega

DISTRIBUTOR: Ozisoft

WHAT WE SAID THEN:

"This racing simulation from Sega features some really cool 3D graphics, easy to handle controls and challenging courses that should please the speed demon in anyone. It's peppered with just enough driving-model realism, great graphics, cool options and of course the always popular replay function. But you can't total your car!"

68% in PCPP #41

Soul Reaver: Legacy Of Kain	81	#43
Soulbringer	80	#51
South Park Rally	41	#47
Spec Ops 2	60	#46
Speed Demons	55	#47
● Starlancer	93	#49
Star Trek: Armada	56	#49
Star Trek: Hidden Evil	69	#46
Star Trek: Starfleet Command	87	#43
SU-27 Flanker 2.0	83	#44
● Swat 3	90	#46
Sydney 2000	85	#52
● System Shock 2	98	#42
Theocracy	76	#49
The Wheel of Time	84	#45
● Thief Gold	96	#45
● Thief II: The Metal Age	95	#49
Theme Park World	80	#45
Tiger Woods 2000	84	#49
Tomb Raider: Last Revelation	89	#43
Traitor's Gate	78	#44
UEFA Manager	79	#51
Ultima Online	68	#48
Ultima IX: Ascension	70	#45
Unreal: Return to Na Pali	72	#41

Superbike 2000

DEVELOPER: EA Sports

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts

DISTRIBUTOR: Electronic Arts

WHAT WE SAID THEN:

"The bikes behave almost exactly like the real thing. Too much gas or stoppers into a corner and you'll be scrubbing the dirt or looking for a soft place to land. On the other hand, just the right amount of throttle will produce some brilliant, corner-carving slides. It's the combination of wondrous visuals and highly accurate physics that makes Superbike 2000 the success that it is."

89% in PCPP #49

● Unreal Tournament	94	#45
Urban Chaos	85	#46
Vampire: The Masquerade	82	#52
Wild Wild West	65	#51
World Manager	34	#48

SCORE LIST QUIZ!

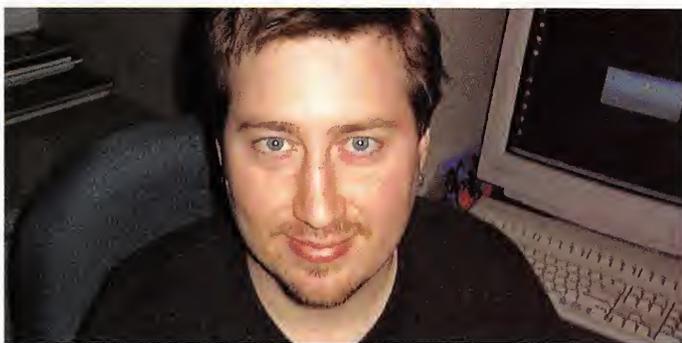
WIN YOUR CHOICE OF THE BEST OF RACING GAMES!

All you have to do is tell us which game this image comes from. (Clue: it's a small section of a screenshot published in PCPP.) Send to the usual competitions address, marking your envelope to "Best of Racing", and writing your answer on the back. Don't forget to tell us which game of the eight featured on these pages you would like to win. Winners notified in PCPP#55.



IN HINDSIGHT...

Deus Ex



WE PIN DOWN ION STORM'S HARVEY SMITH AND QUIZ HIM ABOUT HOW IT FEELS TO SEE DEUS EX ON THE SHELVES

W hat if the wildest conspiracy theories floating about were true? That's the world that Ion Storm Austin has faced you with in Deus Ex, and it's not pretty. Set in a violent vision of the future where even the Statue of Liberty has taken the brunt of social upheaval (read: had its head blown off), you're never quite sure of the motivations of even your allies as the game draws you into its world of moral grey areas.

From a gameplay standpoint Deus Ex is structured to allow for free-formed solutions, offering multiple ways to solve almost any problem. Shooting it out, sneaking by, or getting security systems to do the dirty work for you are all viable options to JC Denton, a special agent in the future UN (UNATCO). He's your character, and it's up to you to decide how best to deal with whatever problem crops up.

Such open-ended options, though, are complicated from a design standpoint. Deus Ex raises the bar with its open-ended gameplay, but how well does it actually work in practice? I spoke with Harvey Smith, one of Deus Ex's lead designers, about his thoughts on this and more post-release.

PCPP: Okay, first thing's first... clarify once and for all for the argumentative fans out there, is it "Day-us Ecks" or "Dyoose Ecks"?

Harvey Smith: Well, I don't want to tackle the issue if it comes down to a difference between Australian and Texan accents, but we say, "Day-oos Ecks."

PCPP: How do you feel about the final, boxed, retail version of Deus Ex?

HS: Artistically, I'll never be completely satisfied. That said, I'm very happy with the way the game turned out.



Just another day in the subways of the Big Apple

PCPP: The game has been garnering a lot of comparisons to games like System Shock 2 and Thief. How warranted do you think those are?

HS: In that we're a highly interactive sci-fi firstperson RPG/action hybrid, the comparison to Shock (and Shock 2) is warranted. In that we have some stealth features, the comparison to Thief is valid as well. On a more abstract level, DX is akin to those games for other reasons related to the fact that the community of people making this type of game is fairly small.

PCPP: Did the game's development schedule run more or less smoothly than you had anticipated at the start of the project?

HS: More smoothly. When it comes to dealing with development teams, publishers, the industry, the trade shows, design issues, technological changes and other such major issues, I always assume the worst. I was pleasantly surprised by DX (and Eidos).

PCPP: What were the team's aims for the game before it became Deus Ex? Were there any other ideas you discussed doing? What sort of inspiration was drawn on for design?

HS: Globe hopping from one real world setting to the next. RPG/Action/Adventure hybrid with multiple solutions, drawn from SF/Cyberpunk, Conspiracy Theory and Action/Spy Thriller fiction.

PCPP: Was trying to combine all of those sorts of initial ideas





The GEP gun: destruction is the better part of valour

difficult? Or did they all lend themselves fairly well to a fairly cohesive general direction?

HS: It nearly drove us mad. Some games are easy to prototype early; other games come together (achieving cohesion) only near the last six months in a weird synthesis way. DX was the latter.

PCPP: How much did the game change during development? Or how close to its original design document did it remain?



It's bad luck to give knives

HS: Well, the original plan involved some of the game's elements at a high level (like, "multiple solutions to problems"), but did not detail well how those elements would be pulled off. So I'd say that, like all projects, things 'changed' a lot, in that we were constantly evolving the game.

PCPP: What was the greatest challenge the team faced?

HS: Sticking to the real world nature of the game's setting. Also, the sheer size, complexity and general ambition of the game kept us jumping through hoops.

PCPP: What would you have liked to have added but were unable to (for whatever reason)?

HS: Co-op multiplayer.

PCPP: Which one aspect of the game are you most proud of?

HS: The high level of interactivity and the player's freedom of action within a location make me really happy.

PCPP: What have you learned from Deus Ex that you'll be taking into your next project?

HS: A million things, really. Mostly, I've gotten better at interacting with people. That's the thing that matters most when making games.

PCPP: Any plans for a sequel or an add-on, maybe?

HS: We're talking about that stuff, but no plans are firm.

PCPP: What about a level editor of some sort?

HS: There wasn't one with the initial release, obviously, but who knows...
[Note: After this interview was conducted, Ion Storm announced the release of the Deus Ex Software Development Kit.]

PCPP: What are some of the more memorable things about working on the game? Any high and low points?

HS: High points are when features come together and you can play through an area that was previously a concept. Low points have been the super-stressful conflict that comes from working with a team of people with wildly different styles and opinions on game design. In the end, it was worth it - everyone on the team made the game a little better for their input.

PCPP: Thanks, Witchboy.

second take



When it comes down to finding a place for it in typical computer gaming categories, Deus Ex is difficult to pigeonhole. Combining elements of FPS, RPG and stealth genres, it certainly doesn't seem eager to conform to any particular pre-existing labels. Ion Storm has borrowed a term coined by Looking Glass Studios (may they rest in peace), the "immersive reality simulation".

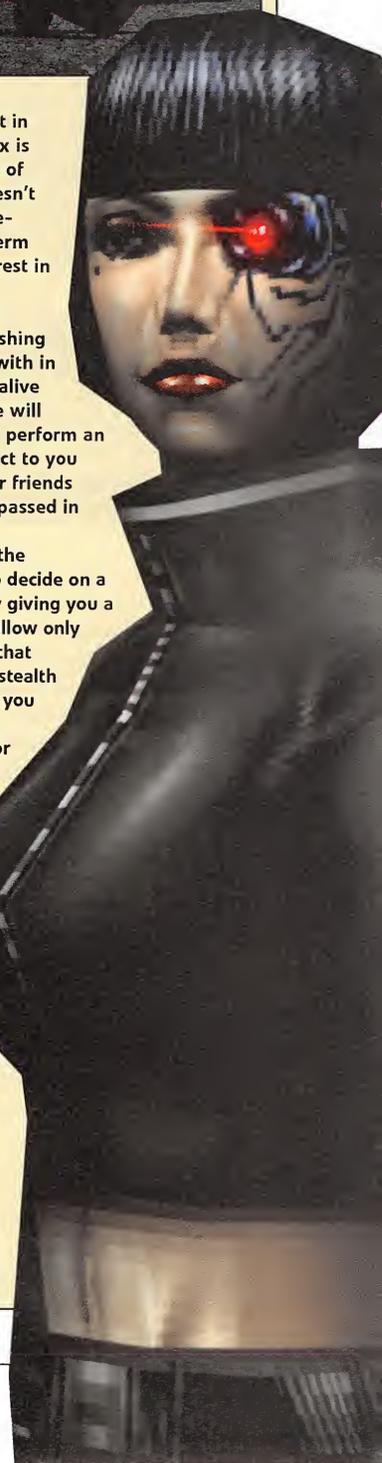
While not truly trying to simulate a full reality, Deus Ex does a convincing job of fleshing out the parts of its world you need to deal with in your travels. Each area you visit feels quite alive and responsive to your actions; most people will remember you if you speak to them or even perform an action in their presence. Many will even react to you based on having heard about you from their friends who you may have dealt with (or even just passed in the street) previously.

On top of the excellent level of feedback the environments provide, Deus Ex allows you to decide on a method of action on the fly instead of simply giving you a single main style of playing. Mostly, games allow only one main solution method for the problems that face the player: in Thief, if you diverge from stealth you will fail most of your missions. Similarly, you can't play Quake like Thief with any success.

Deus Ex, however, allows you to choose (or even combine) various methods depending on the situation, what tools you have available to you, or even just your current mood, and all without any deliberate switching from one "mode" to another. The choices are made by the player, not as a function of a special switchover in the game's mechanics from one thing to another. That is a clever design move in and of itself, as it creates one multi-faceted whole rather than a disjointed 3-in-1.

Together, its immersive environments and freeform (freestyle RPG?) style of play make Deus Ex a game to be heartily recommended. Ion Storm has managed to pull off an ambitious design goal, and in doing so have created a game well deserving of its PCPP Platinum status and 1st place in last month's Top 100.

Murray Philbrick





Diablo 2 Playguide

MURRAY PHILBRICK CLICKS SOME DEMONS TO DEATH

A hit before it was even released, *Diablo 2* is a return to the addictive, simplistic gameplay of the original. While its critics cite this as one of the main flaws of the game, both *Diablo* and its sequel are easy to just pick up and play with a series of simple (and usually frantic) mouse clicks.

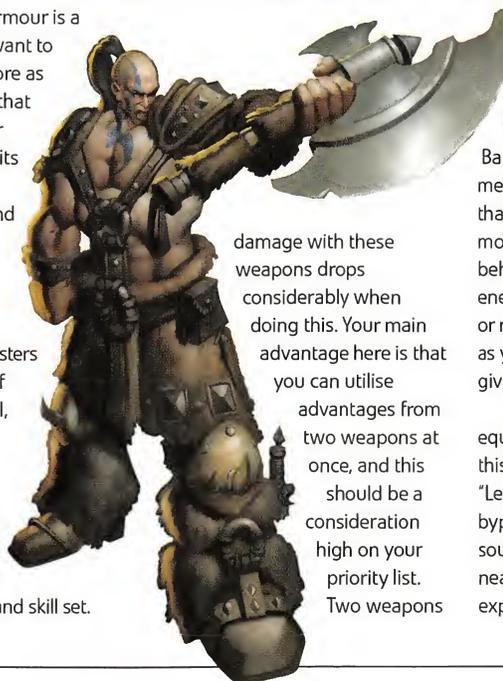
The simplicity of the game's interface, though, belies the fact that *Diablo 2* is a game full of a wealth of options and additions that its predecessor simply didn't have. With a total of five different player classes, a preferential skill-based system, and a much larger and more in-depth game world, it has managed to improve upon the original while still containing more of what made *Diablo* a classic. Moreover, though, it requires more thought and a little planning to know just where to put those valuable character and skill points, as well as some thought as to how you can best use the skills that you have creatively.

Barbarian

The Barbarian's specialty is getting in close enough to smell the bad breath of his opponents, so being able to dish out a lot of damage in combination with decent armour is a must. Armour-wise, you'll want to go for as high a defence score as you can, and at later levels that means you will need higher strength for those heavy suits of Gothic plate.

Two things to bear in mind when choosing your armour, though, are elemental resistance and movement speed. You'll get thoroughly pasted by spellcasters in the later acts of the game if you have no resistances at all, and heavier suits of armour drain your stamina more quickly and slow you down. It's up to you to find a suitable balance between these three factors in a way that suits your playing style and skill set.

As Barbarians are able to use certain varieties of two-handed weapons in one hand, many people prefer this method of damage dishing. Bear in mind, though, that your



damage with these weapons drops considerably when doing this. Your main advantage here is that you can utilise advantages from two weapons at once, and this should be a consideration high on your priority list. Two weapons

with the ability to steal 6% of life from someone per hit, combined with either Double Swing or Frenzy, can make sure you actually sustain your health through a protracted battle even when surrounded and being beaten to a pulp.

Tricks of the Trade - Monster Spawners

Barbarians have several excellent methods for dealing with creatures that spawn other creatures. For the most part, these spawners will stay behind their minions and fire at enemies from long range, resurrecting or replacing the minions in your path as you cut them down, and generally giving you a hard time.

The Barbarian is fortunately well-equipped to deal with situations like this, starting with his level 6 skill of "Leap", which allows him to simply bypass the minions and attack the source of the problem (or at least land near to it). Leap Attack at level 18 expands on this with a longer range

RARE AND UNIQUE?

There is some confusion as to the difference between rare and unique items. Rare items have names which appear in yellow, and some of their statistics are variable. Unique items have a brownish grey colour of writing, often have their own special graphic, and have statistics that are set in stone.



Avoiding melee combat is paramount for the Sorceress

and an immediate and powerful attack upon landing, while level 30's Whirlwind brings the ideal solution: cut down the minions on your way there, rather than simply avoid them!

Amazon

While it's quite possible to play the Amazon as an all-rounder who's good with both bows/crossbows and spears/javelins, it's probably a better idea to

concentrate on one or the other in order to consolidate your character and skill points more effectively.

Using bows, the primary aim will be to keep your distance from any foes given your higher dexterity won't allow for heavy armour until very high levels. Alternatively, spears and javelins rely on strength for their damage score (bows and crossbows don't), so the higher strength there will help you with wearing heavier and more protective armour. Bows and crossbows don't rely on strength in order to decide how damaging they are, and

therefore you'll be better off spending character points on dexterity. Alternatively, spears and javelins are strength-powered, and thus a higher strength becomes necessary both for damage and the wearing of heavier armour (which is necessary for using the spear/javelin melee combat skills).

Tricks of the Trade - Immolation Arrow Techniques

The immolation arrow is one of the Amazon's more powerful attacks with its combination of splash damage and timed flame damage. The main problem is getting opponents to stay within the flames for long enough to take the maximum damage from this maintenance skill.

The easiest method of doing this is to simply target a small group with a freezing arrow, holding them in place for a short time and then quickly firing an



Zombies fall prey to the Nova spell

immolation arrow at the same target to trap them all within the flames for a short while. Similarly, anything that slows a target down (ice arrows) is nearly as effective.

Finally, to ensure the largest number of opponents wander through the flames, make sure you keep your distance and stick to falling back in a single direction. This allows you to keep on hammering the closest attacker with the arrows, leaving all those forming a queue behind him to wander through the remaining flames as they close in.

Sorceress

The primary focus of the Sorceress is spellcasting, which makes a high energy score a must. Dexterity, too, can help in keeping her away from being swamped with melee opponents by simply keeping her distance. This leaves her with very few points to spend on strength, however, so heavy armour is all but a pipe dream for her until fairly late levels. Still, you should at least try to get her strength high enough to wear hardened leather (or even studded leather, if you feel so inclined) for the protection it affords her.

While it is possible for a Sorceress to wield any weapons with the right statistics, character point limitations make that impractical until higher levels. Most short and long staves add skill levels to a Sorceress' spells in some form, though, so overall it can be a better idea to take advantage of that. With any luck, the bonuses will be enough to ensure nobody gets close enough to her for her somewhat lacking melee skills to come into play.

Tricks of the Trade - Avoiding Melee

One of the primary concerns for any sorceress character is to avoid melee combat at all costs. While you can still



fire off spells at close range, her lack of heavy armour ensures that her being pummelled when hemmed in is a virtual certainty. Even with high-damage spells such as Nova and the various magical armour types being suited to this task, it is definitely recommended that you still keep your distance.

How do you do that, though? For starters, investing in an above-average dexterity will both increase your defence score and let you be quicker on your feet. Equipment with fast (or, even more preferably, fastest) run/walk is even better. Teleport can also come in quite handy to get out of a tight spot, though bear in mind that you can no longer teleport blindly into a room you can't actually see.

Finally, be sure to invest some skill points into some spells which can freeze opponents, preferably en masse (or quickly, at the very least). If you can slow your enemies down as they close in, it gives you time to fire off those few extra fireballs that can be the difference between living and getting a mouth full of dirt.



Individual vultures are relatively harmless, but in groups they're a force to be reckoned with



In Flam! Hey, it worked!!!



Spells and stairs don't mix, kids



A hasty retreat may be due



Beware lightning-enchanted foes



Experience shrines are a boon

Necromancer

There's nothing worse than having the local Rogue's guild laughing at you when you're trying to look as scary as a Necromancer, but when you're being forced to run from even the smallest opponents when they somehow make it past your bony bodyguards, that's what ends up happening.

A high strength for a necromancer's heavy armour can be vitally important due to their overall lack of true combat skills, particularly in later acts where their minions are routinely turned into bone chips in a matter of split seconds.

Weapon-wise, at earlier levels it's probably wise to stick with wands or similar items with a nice combination of a quick speed and bonuses to undead-raising skills. At later levels, though, it will become more necessary to mix it up with your

opponents on a regular basis, so you may prefer to go with something more effective than a small magical twig at that point. Keep in mind, though, that there are some rare items and weapons that will still raise your Necromantic skills by 1 all around. If you're lucky enough to find one of these, replacing your wand with something more likely to sever limbs probably won't be as monumental a downside.

Tricks of the Trade - The Blood Golem and Iron Maiden Trick

Really only useful in the Normal difficulty setting (harder difficulty settings will usually lead to a very dead necromancer... oh, the irony), this particular trick relies on exploiting the abilities of your blood golem. As the golem shares both his life force and any damage he takes with you, normally it can be quite risky to have him being surrounded and pounded on.



HYDRA

The ability to plant the Hydra anywhere within your line of sight makes it particularly handy for clearing rooms without having to actually enter them. Simply stand back, cast it just inside the doorway, and watch as it decimates anything inside.





Like lambs to the slaughter



Yeti are best dealt with from afar



Lightning spells prove effective against fire-enchanted skeletons

Once you are able to cast the Iron Maiden curse, though, any risk associated with this can be nullified entirely by casting it on any and all opponents who are targeting the golem. This leaves him free to absorb (and share) the monster's life force with no risk of damage, as the attacking demons will be closer to dying with every hit that they land. The result is usually quite dramatic and effective, especially if the golem is surrounded on all sides; your health bar will fill up

in a second flat, more often than not, and assuming you pick your opponents correctly.

Paladin

The Paladin is a hybrid class, with excellent combat abilities in combination with various special magical powers called "auras".

Fortunately, most of these auras require very little (if any) mana to be used when activated, which leaves you free to concentrate more on skills and statistics relating to combat.

The Paladin is similar to the Barbarian in its requirements; good armour for melee combat (and therefore a decent strength), combined with both a decent vitality and dexterity for health points and defence speed. The main difference, though, is that the Paladin is unable to wield two weapons at once (though one skill allows him to use his shield as a bashing weapon, though overall not too effectively).

Most Paladins elect to use a shield for the extra defence it supplies, though the extra damage provided by a two-handed weapon can definitely be useful in some situations. Ranged weapons such as bows, too, aren't a total loss for the

Paladin, though overall it is probably wiser to invest more character points in strength rather

than dexterity simply because the Paladin has very few skills that will have an effect on using a bow.

Tricks of the Trade - The Party Leader

The Paladin's auras provide various wide-ranging effects, from causing damage to opponents who hit party members, through to absorbing the bodies of fallen demons and converting them into health and mana for the entire party.

The Paladins are defensive, for the most part, and as such it often falls on the Paladin in the party to keep an eye on its other various members and ensure that they are in the best of

health and are as safe as they possibly can be.

As a Paladin, you'll soon discover that it's necessary to keep tabs on all manner (*Groan! - Ed*) of things, from your party's health through to who's low on mana or what kind of attacks are incoming. The Paladin has enough auras to ensure that his party can receive an appropriate bonus in any given situation, whether it's extra resistance from elemental attacks or just a quick burst of speed to get away from a bad situation. They're there to be used, and surprisingly effective, so get used to juggling your hotkeys around quickly based on whatever you seem to be facing at the time. ■



ARMY OF THE UNDEAD

While it's definitely not a recommended strategy, Necromancers are actually able to raise as many as 20 skeletons at once (or even more with the proper magical bonuses) if they keep applying their skill points to it!



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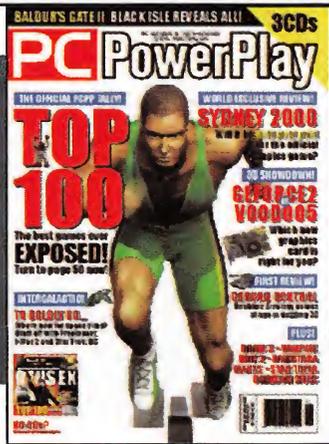
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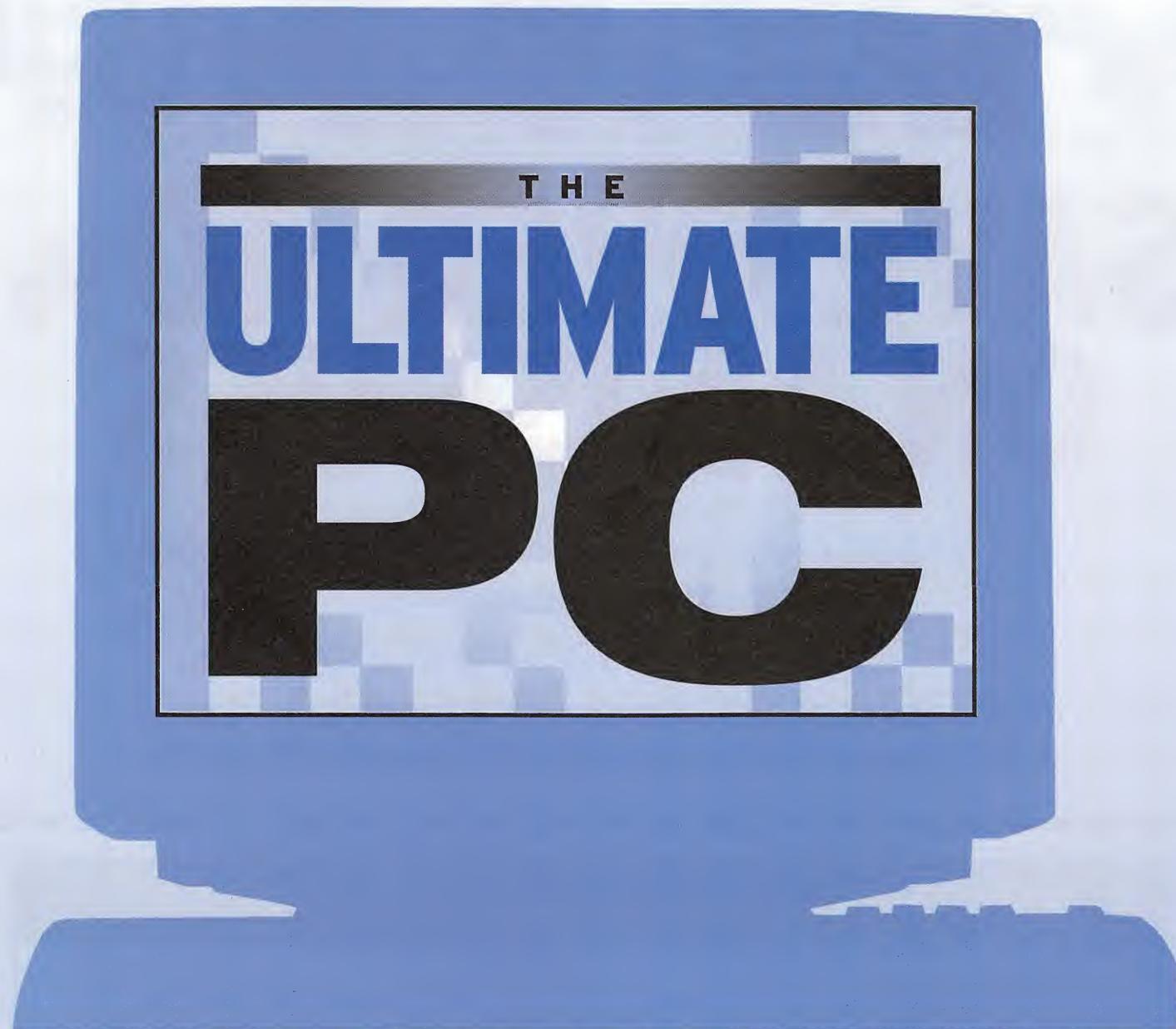
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THE MILLENNIUM RIG

BY HUGH NORTON-SMITH AND SEBASTIAN FERN

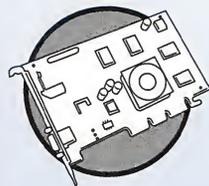


With the introduction of the GST, the cost of computer equipment has fallen quite significantly. And with the current crop of games demanding the latest hardware available, what better time to upgrade the overclocked 286/S3 Virge system...

With the Ultimate PC system, we've tried to channel all the individual reviews, previews, features and assorted hardware advice into a concise, comprehensive system recommendation guide. As you've probably noticed, performance hasn't been the only consideration with this Ultimate PC - when choosing parts for this system, we've been after a decent compromise between price and lip-smacking performance. The AMD Duron, for instance, is a CPU that offers fantabulous performance at a bloody low price. That's what we're talking about: stretching each dollar to the max.

Although it might appear a daunting prospect for the uninitiated, building a killer PC at home can be an easy affair. Once you have the hardware itself, and are aware of a few fundamentals, assembly is not much harder than advanced Meccano. However, there are a myriad of potential cock-ups awaiting the unwitting buyer making such a costly purchase - We've tried to cut through all the collective myth, conflicting online product reviews and the dubious advice on offer to provide you with this tome of computer purchasing advice. Now that you have the credit card handy, just follow the guide and a very respectable rig can be yours while sticking to a reasonable budget... Obviously each individual's needs will vary greatly, but that's the appeal of building a custom system - it can be tailored to fit your exact needs. ■





Videocards

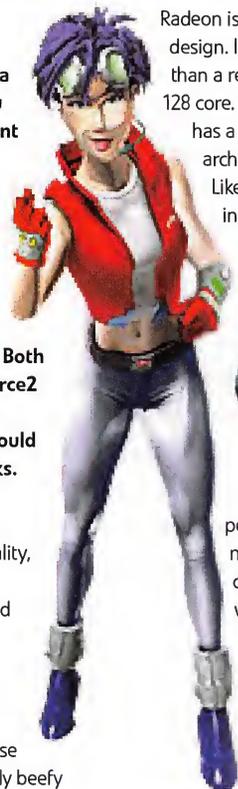
For many people, the choice of video card will be more important than their CPU. Indeed, the right graphics card can turn an otherwise mediocre PC into a gaming powerhouse. As you may have noticed from recent coverage in PCPowerPlay, the videocard wars are in full swing once again, with new products from Nvidia, and 3dfx, as well as ATI, Matrox and Videologic preparing to launch new products in the near future. Both the Voodoo5 5500 and GeForce2 GTS cards are now on store shelves, while the others should launch in the next few weeks.

Your purchasing decision shouldn't reflect price and performance alone: image quality, hardware features, DVD acceleration, driver support and the included software bundle should be taken into account. Also, take into account your processor: frankly, there is no point in considering any of these new cards without a reasonably beefy processor. Without a 500MHz+ CPU, you won't be doing justice to the raw power of these next-gen accelerators.

ATI Radeon256

 Formed in 1985, ATI is the world's largest videocard manufacturer. Its basic, business-oriented videocards are featured in almost all major OEM systems, from Dell to Apple. However, with the release of the TNT2 M64, Nvidia has been making increasing inroads into territory once dominated by ATI. Not content with second-place, ATI has attempted to reinvent itself as a competitor within the dog-eat-dog world of 3D accelerators. The Rage128 was a limited success, but the ATI Radeon promises to be the first card that gives the GeForce/3dfx 3D oligarchy some serious competition in the gaming arena.

With a transistor count of 30 million, 5 million more than the GeForce 2 GTS, the Radeon is an impressively complex design. It's also completely new, rather than a redesign of the venerable Rage 128 core. On paper, at least, the Radeon has a significantly more advanced architecture than the GeForce2 GTS. Like the GeForce, the Radeon includes advanced Transform and Lighting abilities. TRL is

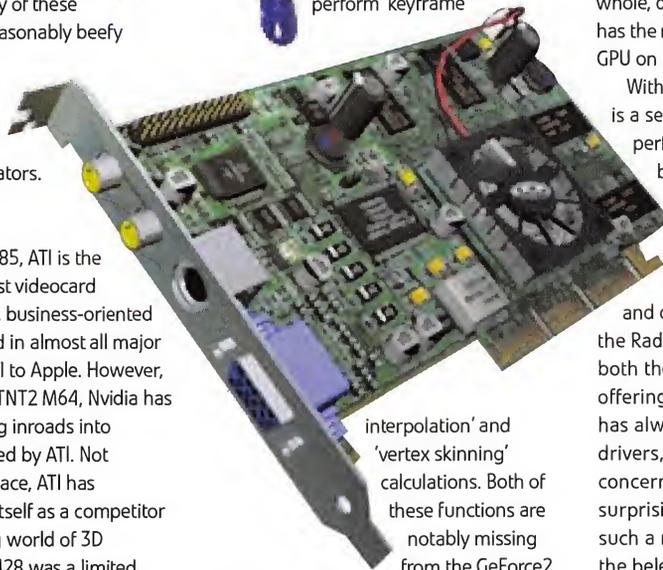


performed via the ludicrously named 'Charisma Engine' (Sony can be blamed for this rubbish), which is very similar to the Nvidia GPU. In addition to transform, lighting and clipping operations, the Charisma Engine can also perform 'keyframe

Charisma Core carries out animation-morphing. For example, a game developer may design a starting and stopping frame in a given animation, and the Radeon will take over in between, providing a convincing transformation from the first frame to the last. 'Vertex Skinning' is another animation improvement, which allows in-game characters to move hyper-realistically. Neither of these functions are native to DirectX, so game developers must code their games to support this specifically. In addition, the Radeon features hardware-based Environmental Bump Mapping, much like the Matrox G400. Games like Slave Zero

witness a huge aesthetic improvement with EBM enabled. Finally, a limited form of tile rendering, dubbed 'HyperZ', is used in the Radeon. ATI claims that HyperZ can, in optimal circumstances, increase the effective bandwidth of a 3D scene by up to 20%. Obviously, ATI's tile based rendering isn't as advanced as the version used by PowerVR chipsets. On the whole, developers agree that the Radeon has the most capable and feature-heavy GPU on the market.

With such a potent design, the Radeon is a serious contender for the performance crown. Although the 16-bit speed is comparatively average, the Radeon pulls away from the competition when using 32-bit True Colour textures at high resolutions. The real issue is price and driver problems. At the moment, the Radeon is priced slightly higher than both the 3dfx and Nvidia offerings, while offering similar performance levels. ATI has always been hindered by its average drivers, so naturally, we were rather concerned. Thankfully, the Radeon has surprisingly robust drivers, especially for such a new board. And, in contrast to the beleaguered Rage Fury Maxx, the Radeon does offer full Windows 2000 support. As with all ATI cards, the Radeon has built-in hardware DVD decompression codec. Excellent.



interpolation' and 'vertex skinning' calculations. Both of these functions are notably missing from the GeForce2 GTS GPU. Keyframe interpolation is the most interesting of these developments, and allows for faster skeletal animation. In this advanced method of acceleration, the

3dfx Voodoo5 5500

While Nvidia and ATI believe hardware T&L is the future, 3dfx considers its 'T-buffer', which includes features like Full Screen Anti Aliasing (FSAA), as superior. Every Voodoo card supports FSAA right out of the box, which goes a long way in eliminating jagged edges within games. The appeal of 3dfx's FSAA implementation is that it works right out of the box - games don't need specific code to take advantage of this feature. Drop in any Glide, OpenGL or Direct3D game, and FSAA will work flawlessly. In addition, 3dfx's method of FSAA is also quicker and better looking than competing solutions. Also, the Voodoo line-up now supports proper 32-bit colouring and large texture support. For the first time ever, games look best on a 3dfx card. Those with large monitors will also appreciate the high-quality RAMDAC used in the Voodoo5 cards - 2D image quality is stunning.

Packing two VSA-100 chips in an SLI-configuration, the Voodoo5 5500 is a speedy beast, offering similar benchmark results to the GeForce 256 DDR. Although the GeForce 2 GTS and ATI Radeon are faster, the Voodoo5 still offers very respectable performance, particularly with FSAA enabled.

As with all Voodoo cards, the V5 5500 comes with support for the Glide graphics library. Pundits have prematurely declared Glide a dead API. This isn't the case. Witness the deluge of games based around the Unreal engine, and it's quite apparent that Glide support is far from irrelevant. Even though Direct3D support is satisfactory, Glide remains the most consistent API for playing Unreal engine games.

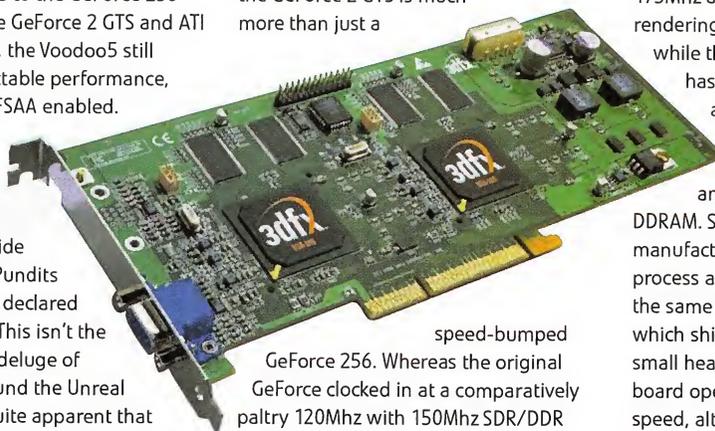
In sum, with the most stable drivers available, exceptional image quality and Glide support, the Voodoo 5 5500 kicks like the proverbial mule. We love ours.

Asus V7700 Pure GeForce2 GTS 64Mb DDR



Asus, known best for their impeccably constructed motherboards, have always been the first manufacturer to offer Nvidia cards on the Australian market. They also offer some of the most fully featured solutions available, including the Deluxe models. Their latest offering is the V7700, a card which features a whopping 64Mb of DDR SDRAM.

Based upon the Nvidia GeForce 2 GTS chipset, the V7700 is blazingly fast. The revised GPU can now pump out a sustained rate of more than 25 million polygons a second. In fact, the GeForce 2 GTS kicks the crap out of many professional cards, including the exorbitantly priced Oxygen GVX1 card. With many architectural improvements, the GeForce 2 GTS is much more than just a



speed-bumped GeForce 256. Whereas the original GeForce clocked in at a comparatively paltry 120Mhz with 150Mhz SDR/DDR memory, the new board features a 200Mhz core and 166Mhz DDR Memory. True, the V7700 is just a plain-Jane card,

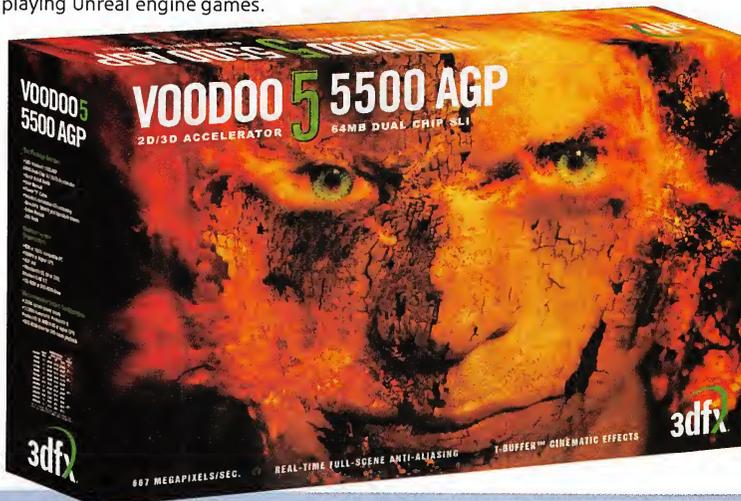
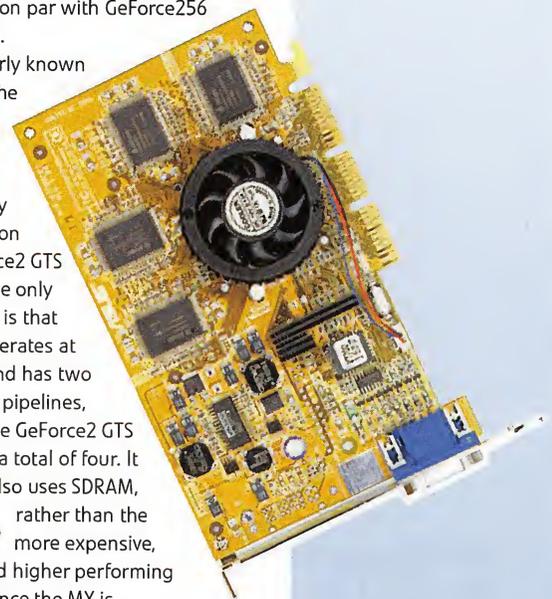
without TV-In/Out or any other fripperies, but it's awesomely fast. And for most people, that's just dandy.

Asus V7100 Geforce2 MX

For most people, paying \$700 every 6 months on a new videocard isn't feasible. That's where the GeForce2 MX steps in. Aptly described as the Celeron of videocards, the V7100 is a budget priced videocard that offers ace performance. Using a bastardised GeForce2 GTS core, the V7100 is priced at the same level as many GeForce256 SDR cards, yet performs on par with GeForce256 DDR cards.

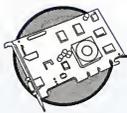
Formerly known as NV11, the MX chipset itself is based very closely upon the GeForce2 GTS design. The only difference is that the MX operates at 175Mhz and has two rendering pipelines, while the GeForce2 GTS has a total of four. It also uses SDRAM, rather than the more expensive, and higher performing

DDRAM. Since the MX is manufactured under the same .18 micron process as the GTS, it ought to operate at the same clock speed as its older sibling, which ships at 200Mhz. By adding a small heatsink and fan, our MX sample board operated happily at 218Mhz core speed, although overclocking the memory had the most obvious rewards. While the performance gains were noticeable, the lack of DDR memory doesn't let the MX approach GTS levels. In conclusion, the V7100 is a worthy purchase, particularly for those on a restrictive budget.

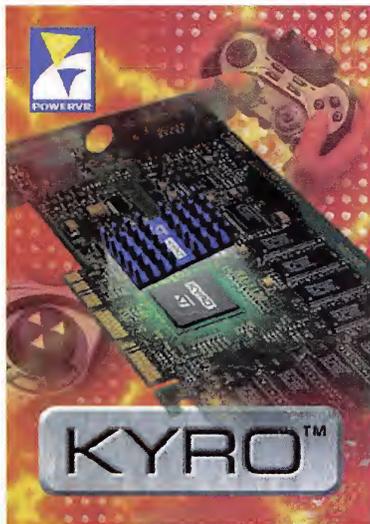


KYRO™ Videologic PowerVR Kryo

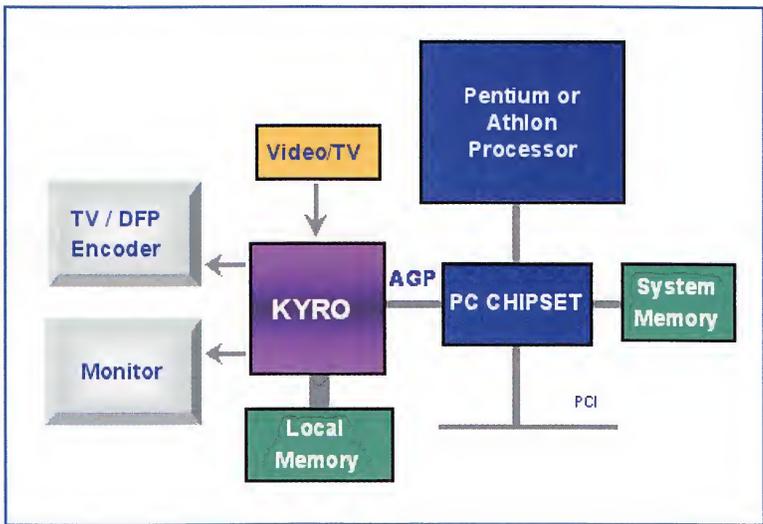
The PowerVR was one of the first dedicated 3D accelerator chips to hit the PC scene, and while overshadowed by the Voodoo Graphics card, the series has been further developed by Videologic. The Series 2 chipset is used as the basis of the Sega Dreamcast console, and was also featured on the rather disappointing Neon 250 graphics card.



The Ultimate PC: Videocards



Now, Videologic has released the Kyro, which is based around PowerVR Series 3 technology. The PowerVR architecture has a radically new method of rendering 3D scenes. Rather than the 'brute force' method utilised in standard videocards, the PowerVR chipset efficiently breaks the scene down into a series of tiles. Only the visible tiles are drawn, which takes away all over draw and lots of Z-Buffer data. Of note, GigaPixel also pursued this route, and were recently acquired by 3dfx. Also, ATI has also utilised a very



stripped-down version of tile-based rendering in the Radeon line of cards. Apparently, the technology has promise - judging from the Kyro's benchmark results, tile based rendering is the future. Even though the Kyro operates at a slothful 110Mhz, with 166Mhz memory and a fill rate below that of a TNT2 Ultra, the Kyro is able to pin down a GeForce DDR, and in some limited examples outperform the GeForce 2 GTS. A Kyro operating at a higher clock speed would be virtually unstoppable.

Although we didn't have a shipping board, the performance of our beta board, using pre-release drivers, was excellent. There's also room for improvement before they hit shelves. We can't wait for a release-quality board.

We Recommend:
Undecided.

All of the cards featured are fast enough to last some time, and are up to the gills in cool features. It's a matter of personal preference, and ultimately, price.

WHERE TO BUY?

It may be easier to buy your PC from a large name-brand manufacturer like Dell, Compaq or even Crazy Wally's budget-PC emporium, but there are many advantages to a DIY system. Most importantly, a home-baked gaming setup will always provide you with the best bang for buck - you can decide on the necessary components, and leave out all the other extraneous rubbish that you don't need. Readymade PC systems frequently come bundled with Encarta, Office and the usual assortment of antiquated games, not to mention the obligatory b-grade 'edutainment' software. Obviously, all of this adds to the overall price. Also, a home-made PC will be tailor-made for your requirements if you already own a modem, for example, you need not buy a system with one included. Finally, many of the system manufacturers skimp in important areas, using inferior components. While they are enormously costly, some of the high end systems from the big OEMs, for instance, still feature slow 5,400 RPM hard drives, and integrated video subsystems. Obviously any serious gamer will want to avoid these sorts of configurations.

Although you can often find computer hardware by scouring the back of the newspaper, we advise you buy online. There are several excellent Australian PC online retailers, all of which offer prompt delivery, a huge range of equipment and the best prices available. Check these links for our recommendations:

ComputerMarket Online
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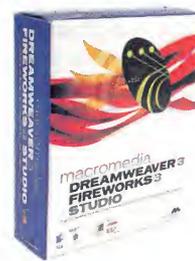
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Monitors



The monitor is the most important output device in a computer's I/O subsystem. The Cathode Ray Tube (CRT) monitor still reigns supreme in terms of clarity and versatility even with the emergence of LCD flat panel technology. The recent trend has been from 14 to 15 to 17-inch tubes becoming the most popular models. A good 19-inch monitor still represents the ultimate realistic option for gamers, although 21-inch models have been gaining in popularity despite their high price.

Flat Panel

Flat panel technology is the future, but at the moment LCD and even plasma screens are not the weapons of choice for gamers. Their digital interface and

means that the optimum viewing-angle is very restrictive.

On the horizon is a new technology based on Light Emitting Polymers (LEPs). LEP monitors fluoresce when an electrical signal is sent through them removing the need for backlighting. This means that an LEP screen can have the same full viewing angle as a CRT monitor, yet be produced in a package even thinner than LCD or plasma screens because no light source is needed behind the thin layer of LEP film. The technology is a while away from being integrated into a consumer product, but prototypes have shown that this is a very viable option. It remains to be seen whether LEPs can overcome the blurring problem associated with LCD refreshing, but theoretically at least there may be a solution.

Things to consider

Back to the reality of the present and the important factors in the visual quality of a display are the dot pitch, which is the distance between each pixel, and the refresh rate. The lower the dot pitch, the sharper an onscreen image looks. Be warned though, due to different display techniques not all figures are comparable. Look for a dot pitch of 0.27mm or lower.

The refresh rate is quite literally how many times the screen is refreshed per second. The higher the refresh rate, the easier it is to look at the screen for long periods of time. Also visible

flickering is reduced up to the point that above 75Hz very few people will notice the flickering. When buying a monitor make sure that it can do at least 75Hz @ 1280x960 resolution.

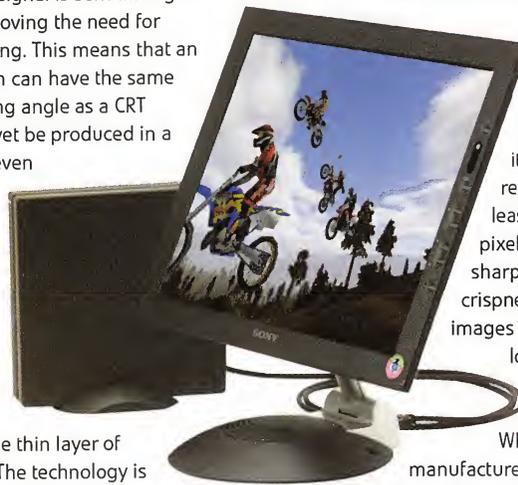
The resolution of a monitor is important, but it is almost a given these days. Don't buy a monitor unless it can produce a resolution of at least 1280x960 pixels. Ultimately the sharpness and crispness of onscreen images is going to have a lot to do with the build quality of the CRT. While most manufacturers produce good quality products, Sony, Hitachi and Viewsonic produce some of the best.

We Recommend

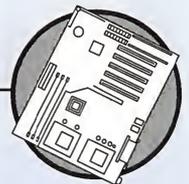
Sony CPD G500 - try out this 21-inch beauty for a day and you'll never want to give it back. **Hugh didn't.**
Sony CPD G400 - the G500's smaller 19-inch sibling still looks stunning, but doesn't take up as much desktop real estate and won't hurt you bank account quite so much either.



small footprint make them a very attractive option, but due to the way the technology works playing high framerate games such as firstperson shooters is simply not possible due to blurring. LCD screens refresh in a different way to CRT monitors, so while they appear to have less flicker at a lower refresh rate this ends up being their downfall. The backlighting also proves problematic and



Motherboards



Compared to videocards or even CPUs, motherboards haven't changed all that much in the last two years. The introduction of AMD's Athlon processor brought along new chipsets and a slightly different system bus, but the motherboard market has not moved at anywhere near the pace of the aforementioned areas.

Standardisation and the fact that chipsets are built by the CPU manufacturers has meant that performance is not the defining factor between one product and the next.

Features and Stability

Your choice of motherboard will initially be dictated by your choice of CPU. Far too often, however, people make sure that they purchase a motherboard that 'fits' their chosen processor, but beyond that give little thought to what is the cornerstone of a PC system. Recently new chipsets options have become available for both AMD and the Intel processors, but these are evolutionary, not revolutionary upgrades. The most important areas to look at in a motherboard are features and stability.

Intel has finally replaced the 440BX chipset with an affordable solution - the 815 and 815e chipsets. These are very similar to the now infamous 820 chipset (and in fact the 815e uses the same I/O Controller Hub - ICH 2 as the 820e), but were designed to use PC100 and PC133 SDRAM rather than super-expensive RDRAM. Both these chipsets have integrated video and the option for integrated sound. Unfortunately, due to the onboard video being painfully underpowered, it means you'll have to pay for features that you're never going to use in a high-powered gaming rig.

In the AMD camp, VIA has updated its Athlon chipset to the KX133 to support the new Thunderbird and Duron

processors. VIA continues to produce better chipsets for the Athlon than AMD's offering in terms of features and performance. Stability does vary greatly from manufacturer to manufacturer using VIA's chipsets, however, so to avoid problems stay with the bigger names in the motherboard business.

Asus CUSL2

ASUS Asus consistently creates motherboards of the highest quality, so much so that other manufacturers look up to Asus and consider its products to be the industry benchmark. The CUSL2 is no exception. The board includes all of the standard features of the i815e chipset: 66/100/133MHz Front Side Bus (FSB), AGP 4x, UltraDMA/100 but also some unique ones that put this board that extra step ahead of the competition. The CUSL2 allows you to run the memory asynchronously from the FSB so that you can run a Celeron chip at 66MHz but have the memory running at 100MHz or run a 133MHz Coppermine with older PC100 memory running at spec. The overclocking options are also fantastic - the Front Side Bus is adjustable from 66 to 200MHz in 1MHz increments. Stability was better than experienced than on any other board. Asus have put six PCI slots and an AGP slot on board, which leaves plenty of room for expansion, but note that there are no ISA slots for legacy support. The CUSL2 offers two Communications Network Riser (CNR)

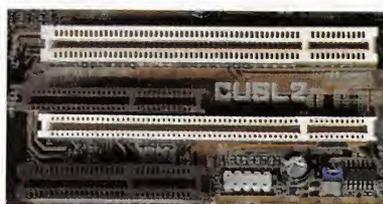
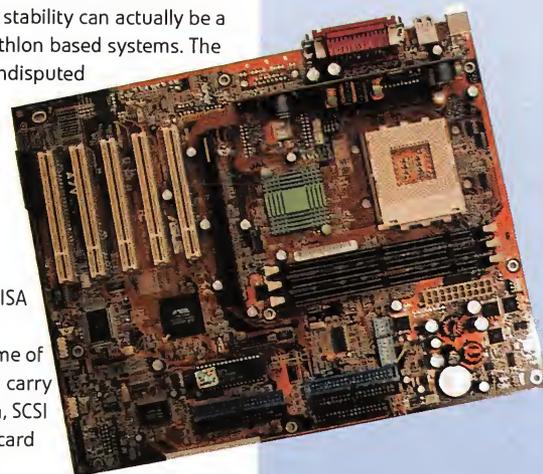
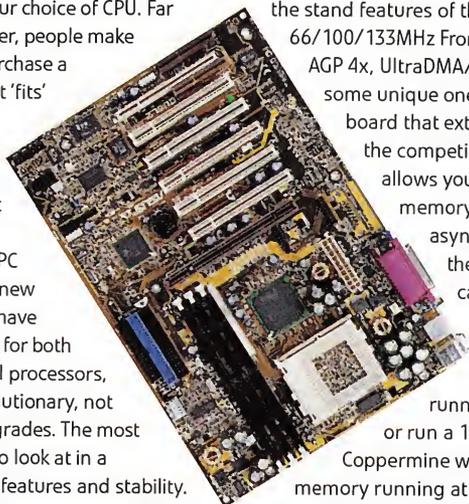
slots and while it remains to be seen CNR technology will take off, the board is well and truly future-proofed. Finally, the board is upgradable to 7 USB slots thanks to an onboard USB hub, but unlike most other manufacturers Asus includes all you need to set up three of the extra slots beyond the basic two straight out of the box.

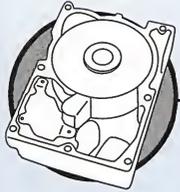
Asus A7V-T

While increased stability is a bonus for Intel chipsets, stability can actually be a problem for Athlon based systems. The A7V-T is the undisputed stability king. Five PCI, one AMR and one AGP slot give the A7V-T plenty of expandability. The lack of an ISA slot may disappoint some of you looking to carry an old modem, SCSI card or soundcard over to a new system, but if you are buying a new system, you can deal with it. The onboard UDMA/66 controller is supplemented by an included Promise ATA/100 PCI controller, so excellent disk speed is assured. And three DIMM slots supporting PC133 memory give high-speed memory access and plenty of room for expansion. For overclocking, the A7V-T provides 1MHz increments, letting you push your CPU to the max. Unless this board just can't be squeezed into your budget, don't look anywhere else.

We Recommend

Intel: Asus CUSL2 or Asus CUC2 if you want to head down the Rambus path.
AMD: Asus A7V-T.
 Asus sets the benchmark and wears the crown in both Athlon and Pentium III/Celeron classes. Rock-solid stability and industry leading features mean it's hard to recommend anything else.





Hard Drives

Hard drive performance is still one of the greatest bottlenecks in any system, so choosing a high performance drive will make an enormous difference to the whole feel of your rig. The speed of a hard drive is really dictated by how fast it rotates, how much cache it has to constantly feed the information over the system bus, and what sort of access time it attains due to both rotation speed and areal density.

The standard rotation speeds are currently 5,400rpm, 7,200rpm, 10,000rpm and 15,000rpm. We can see no reason to recommend purchasing anything slower than a 7,200rpm drive based on current price to performance ratios. If you want the crème de la crème you're going to have to go with SCSI - 10,000rpm and 15,000rpm drives are not yet realities in the IDE domain. The current standards also place SCSI ahead in maximum throughput (160Mb/s for Ultra160 SCSI versus 100Mb/s for ATA/100), but no drive on the market can actually make consistent use of such bandwidth. Access time should be below 10ms - the lower, the better - the top SCSI drives come in just below 4ms.

Bandwidth

ATA/100 is now the high performance standard on the IDE side of the fence, taking over from ATA/66. There has been much speculation about the new standard as to whether it is any faster than ATA/66. Due to current hard drive technology, ATA drives would not be starved for bandwidth even if 33Mb/s were still the limit in transfer rates. The bandwidth of ATA/100 and ATA/66 is only used for brief periods and shows the peak or burst data transfer of the drives. Due to this, the performance difference between ATA/66 and ATA/100 is at this stage almost negligible. That said, as hard drives get faster more of the new standard's bandwidth will be used. Essentially, look at a drive's performance figures in every other area first and then consider ATA/66 or ATA/100. At this stage unless an ATA/100 drive costs the same as its ATA/66 counterpart we cannot justify choosing ATA/100 as the performance difference is negligible.

IBM Deskstar 75GXP

With 7,200rpm, 2MB buffer and 8.5ms access time these drives will have you screaming along and will fit the bill whether you're fragging the enemy or playing with digital video. IBM's drives tend to be quieter than the competition and run slightly cooler. All hard drives are very reliable these days, but IBM stands on top of the hill. The Deskstar 75GXP series support the new ATA/100 series and range in size from 15Gb to 75Gb.

Quantum Fireball Plus AS/LM

Quantum has been the champion of high performance drives at very competitive prices since the company became a player in the storage market. The datasheets of these and the IBM drives could have been separated at birth.



Overall however, the Fireball Plus series is beaten by the IBM drives, but the margin is less than 1%. The LM is the slightly older ATA/66 variant while the Fireball Plus AS is the new ATA/100 series. This drive family comes in capacities from 10.2Gb to 60Gb.

Seagate Barracuda ATA-II

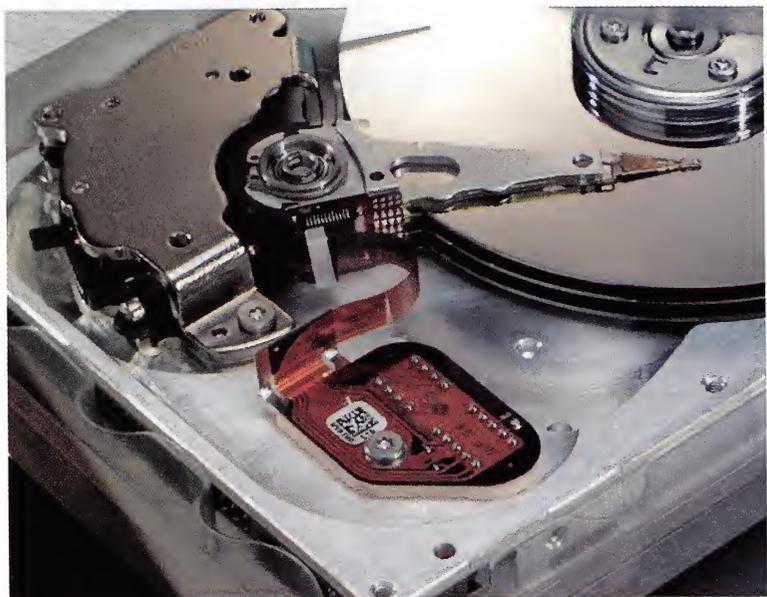
With almost identical specifications to the Quantum and IBM drives, the Seagate Barracuda ATA-II series performs very closely. Seagate brings its 3D Defence System to the table - the drive can take up to 300G's of non-operating shock, so the drive is unlikely to be rendered inoperable by any form of poor postal care. The drive family goes from 10.2Gb to 30.6Gb of formatted capacity.

Seagate Cheetah X15

Simply put this is the fastest hard drive money can buy. At the moment the drive is only available in an 18Gb size, but this is sure to change as the technology matures. 15,000rpm, 3.9ms access time and a 4Mb buffer make this screamer the king of storage - for a price.

We Recommend

The IBM Deskstar 75GXP family is in line with the top IDE drives, being the fastest in many areas. Couple this with quiet operation and IBM's build quality and a winner emerges. For raw speed nothing even comes close to the Seagate Cheetah X15, there's no other drive like it - in terms of price or performance.



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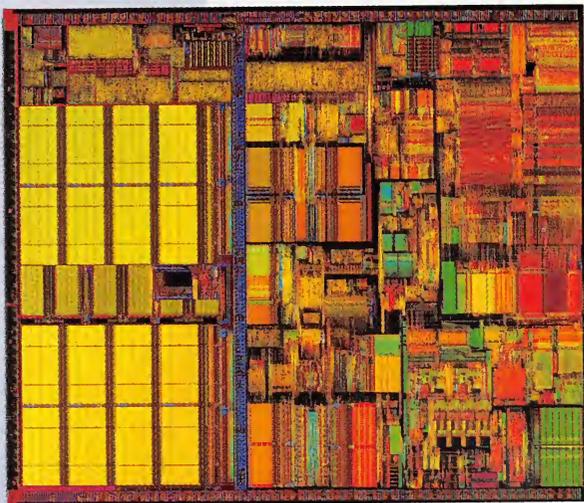
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Processors

The cornerstone of any system, the CPU is undoubtedly the most important purchase you will make. Only chips made by AMD or Intel are worth considering. Gamers should avoid Cyrix/Via chips due to their inferior floating point performance and general compatibility issues.

Contrary to popular belief and the advice of the bespectacled computer geek in the office, there is much more to a processor than merely the



raw clock speed. For example, don't be fooled into believing that a 400MHz Cyrix MIII is comparable to a similarly clocked Intel Celeron. There are quite a few factors that determine the overall speed of a processor.

One of the most important areas is the total cache available to the processor. Caching is one of the most fundamental concepts in computer design philosophy. RAM, page files, L1, L2 are all examples of caching subsystems. Caching maintains a consistent flow of data within a computer: there is a large latency time between input systems (the hard disk) and output (CPU), so the cache regulates this movement of data, making sure that the information hungry

components are kept satiated. All of the current generation of processors come outfitted with both Level 1 and Level 2 cache. These high-speed caches are very important, as they store frequently used information close to the processor. A large cache (128k+) is useful, as it reduces the

frequency of 'cache misses'. A cache miss occurs when the CPU cannot locate the required information within cache, and is forced to access the comparatively tardy system RAM. The Intel Xeon, which features up to 2Mb of CPU cache on a Pentium III core, is extremely popular for web-serving and other business applications. Although very expensive, the additional cache makes oft-repeated database operations much nippier than on conventional processors.

Intel Pentium III

Launched with the usual Intel fanfare 15 months ago, Intel's Pentium III series of CPUs is in the 'golden years' of its lifetime, in anticipation of the recently announced Pentium 4 (Willamette) processor. Based on the

venerable P6 core, which originally debuted with the Pentium Pro, the Pentium III sports several improvements over its predecessors.

Although the integrated SSE instruction set has a very limited effect upon performance, the inclusion of a full 256k of Advanced Transfer Cache keeps the Pentium III a highly competitive solution.

Also, the move to the .18 micron 'Coppermine' core makes the Pentium III highly overclockable, particularly when used in the socketed 'flip-chip' configuration. The Pentium III is now sold at up to 1.13Ghz, with a 1.26Ghz variant expected within the next few weeks. While rather pricey, the Pentium III does offer a compelling mix of speed and wide compatibility.

Intel Celeron

Originally launched in early 1998, the original Celeron was an enormous flop. Although it featured the same P6 core as the Pentium II, it came without any Level 2 cache. This mean-spirited design

decision severely crippled the performance of the processor, particularly in office applications.

Despite this, tweekers soon realised the overclocking potential of the Celeron - without the cache-heat constraints of the Pentium II, the

competitively priced Celeron 266mhz almost always made it to an impressive 400mhz.



With a 100mhz FSB and with the superior FPU, the Celeron at 400Mhz was excellent for 3D gaming. Although it was popular amongst hardware enthusiasts and gamers, the cacheless Celerons were a marketing failure due to their horrendous Windows performance. Intel quickly rectified this by releasing the Celeron A, complete with 128K of full speed on-chip cache. Initially launched at 300 and 333Mhz, the Celeron A was an overclocking giant. It remains the most overclockable chip ever, and still resides in many of our PCs. Where overclocking used to mean moving your PC from 150 to 166Mhz, the Celeron 300A offered a full 50% increase in clock speed, operating at an impressive 450Mhz. The \$130 Celeron 300A, which almost always made it to 450Mhz, offered performance comparable to a \$1,000 Pentium II 450.

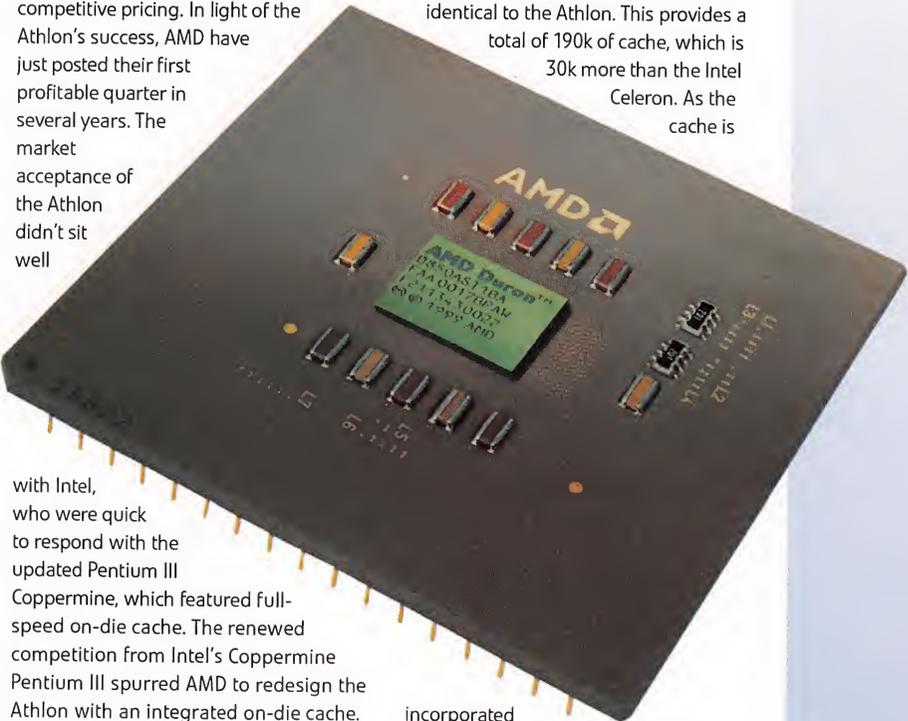
Just recently Intel has released the latest incarnation of the Celeron, which features the same Coppermine core used in the Pentium III. Not only does this mean the addition of SSE instructions, but also the faster Advanced Transfer Cache and the new (and highly overclockable) .18 micron core. Unlike the Pentium III, however, the new Celeron has a restrictive 128k of cache, and still relies upon the 66Mhz Front Side Bus. Although this makes it compatible with older LX boards, the 66Mhz bus has a severe impact upon system speed. Modern games are placing increased demands on memory bandwidth and, frankly, 66Mhz isn't sufficient, particularly when compared to the 200Mhz EV6 FSB featured on the Duron/Athlon. Sadly, the new Celeron only makes sense for people looking to upgrade their LX-system at a minimum of fuss and expense, or those prepared to overclock the Celeron extensively. A bios update is essential.

AMD 'Thunderbird' Athlon

Like Intel, AMD have split their product line-up in two, with the 'Thunderbird' Athlon aimed at the performance dektop market, and the Duron at the SoHo market.

Previously known as the K7, the AMD Athlon is the fastest gaming processor available. When originally released in August 1999, AMD were in

a precarious position. Thankfully, the radically new Athlon CPU surprised reviewers and the gaming public alike with its impressive FPU performance and competitive pricing. In light of the Athlon's success, AMD have just posted their first profitable quarter in several years. The market acceptance of the Athlon didn't sit well



with Intel, who were quick to respond with the updated Pentium III Coppermine, which featured full-speed on-die cache. The renewed competition from Intel's Coppermine Pentium III spurred AMD to redesign the Athlon with an integrated on-die cache. The slow cache featured on the classic Athlon, sometimes operating at 1/3 the speed of the processor, was a major bottleneck. Like the Coppermine, the 'Thunderbird' Athlon includes 256k of full-speed cache. The Thunderbird Athlon is sold in both a socketed and traditional slot-A form factor. Clock-for-clock, the Thunderbird Athlon remains significantly faster and cheaper than its Intel counterparts. The 1Ghz variant is a real screamer.

AMD Duron

Intel rival AMD is set for an onslaught on Intel in the budget-PC and enthusiast market, following the release of the Duron processor. The Duron processor (nee Spitfire) is a derivative of the Athlon, and a replacement for the ailing K6 budget processor. It shares many design elements with the Thunderbird Athlon, including the 200Mhz EV6 bus, an identical core architecture and the enhanced 3dNow! instruction set. In a bid to rationalise costs, the

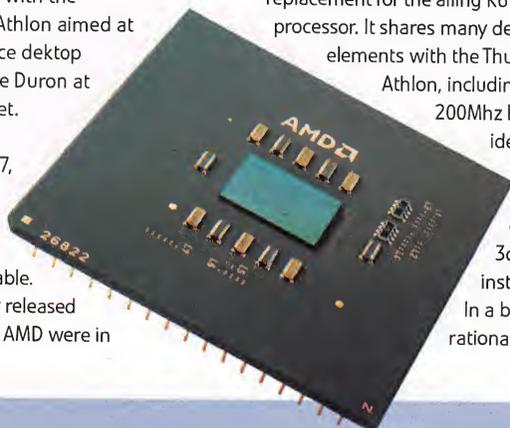
Duron lacks the full 256k L2 cache of the 'Thunderbird' Athlon, instead opting for 64k of L2 cache. Thankfully, the Duron retains a full 128k of L1 cache, which is identical to the Athlon. This provides a total of 190k of cache, which is 30k more than the Intel Celeron. As the cache is

incorporated on-die, the Duron is sold exclusively in a socketed format to keep costs at a minimum. But don't be put-off by the low-tech nametag and rock-bottom price tag: the Duron is still a very potent processor. In fact, clock-for-clock, the Duron is of a very similar speed to the classic, non-Thunderbird Athlon. It's also a very competent overclocker, especially when used in conjunction with a suitable Abit or Asus board.

We Recommend:

AMD Duron 700

The old AMD versus Intel dispute continues stronger than ever before with the Athlon and Pentium III. It's a touchy subject among aficionados of each processor type, but for the performance-savvy consumer, we have to go with AMD. Although it is sold at a budget price, the AMD Duron offers performance generally reserved for the high end - in many of our tests, the Duron was significantly faster than the Intel Pentium III, whilst costing a fair bit less than the Intel Celeron. In fact, the appealing price/performance ratio makes the Duron a perfect choice for frame-rate fanatics and casual gamers.



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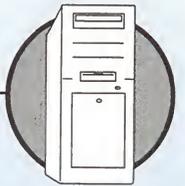
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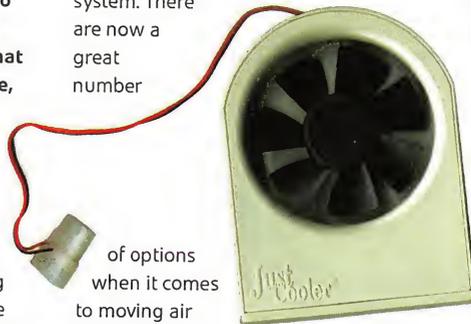
The choice of a case and cooling solution is the most overlooked area of a high-powered rig. Up until a few years ago the system housing was only important if you were an avid overclocker or a dedicated game geek who wanted the best of everything. Obviously the case must be able to contain all the drives and internal peripherals you have and those that you may want to add in the future, but this is not the limit of your case's function.

The form factor of your case must match that of your motherboard. Most cases can support either of the main form factors (being ATX and AT) depending on the installed power supply. For the moment ATX is the best solution and the largest standard. Although it is still available, the AT form factor is slowly being phased out. The size of your case will be dictated by what you want to put inside and how much space you have available. A full tower case will provide the best cooling solution, but it's severe overkill for a system with a single hard drive and one CD-ROM or DVD-ROM.



Airflow

Cooling is important whether you intend to overclock or not. Sufficient airflow over your components (and most critically your videocard and CPU) will prevent overheating and ensure trouble free operation of your system. There are now a great number



of options when it comes to moving air around your case and the fan that's part of your power supply is just the tip of the iceberg. Most cases have spaces designed specifically for standard intake/exhaust fans, but beyond these you can do surgery to any case to add airflow to a specific component. Hard drive coolers are worth a look if you're using a drive that does 10,000rpm or more. Specific slot coolers can also stabilise your overclocked videocard.

The power supply is usually included with the case, so most people don't give it much thought. As long as you're satisfied with the warranty and the amount of power that it can churn out fulfils your needs, you shouldn't have any problems. Athlon systems are far more sensitive to the power supply than their Intel counterparts so always check for compatibility before you buy. Note that a cheap case will mean a cheap power supply. The power supply is also the component with the shortest lifespan and power supply failure is not uncommon in systems three years or older.

Dusty Performance

One thing to consider is whether or not a case has a dust filter on any intake fans. Dust can clog components and will stick to most things inside your case due to the electricity that is moving around.

Dust is unlikely to cause your peripherals to fail but it is possible. A dust filter is a good idea, but it is by no means standard, so don't expect your shiny new box to come with one unless it's specifically mentioned. In very dusty environments, dust filters become more important. Dust is a major contributor to the failure of power supplies.

Finally you must consider the noise created by your cooling solution. You may be able to pass half the volume of air in your room through your computer's housing each second, but chances are your system will sound like a 747 ready to take off. How much noise you can stand is a matter of preference, but do be aware that you will reach diminishing returns with your cooling and just adding more fans is unlikely to get that stubborn processor to run stably at a higher frequency.



We Recommend

InWin Q500N Full tower - all the trimmings and plenty of space for case fans. **3DCool Tornado 1000 Midi tower** - you'll probably need to source it from the US, but with surgery pre-performed this is an overclockers delight.

Just Cooler cooling fans - if you can buy it then you can aerate anything that you can put inside your case.

Soundcards

Audio cards have come a long way since their lowly beginnings in the early 80s. From the Adlib cards, through the SoundBlaster 16 and up to cards like the Sonic Fury, gaming audio has gone through a virtual revolution. One of the most important advances has been the advent of 3D positional audio support. The ability to simulate the position of a sound in a 3D world, using only 2 or 4 speakers, has added a new dimension to games - In titles like *Thief 2* and *System Shock 2*, an ISA soundcard and tinny speakers just won't do justice to the aural soundscape. With the demise of Aureal, there are only three major players within the PC audio race: Diamond, Videologic and Creative. However, before going out and purchasing any of these cards, remember that without proper speakers, you might as well be using a SoundBlaster Pro. We recommend either the Videologic Sirocco Crossfire or the Klipsch ProMedia speakers as an adjunct to your sound card - they'll put most home theatre systems to shame.

Videologic Sonic Fury

With more than 420Mips of processing power, the integrated Crystal SoundFusion DSP features Dynamic Resource Reconfiguration. DRR allows



for smarter audio acceleration, including hardware assisted digital audio decoding. For example, the hardware MP3 decoding engine should provide for seamless MP3

Videologic SYSTEMS

playback without any skipping, regardless of what else you're doing on your computer. This is one area that the Sonic Fury is clearly superior to its predecessor and competition - Much like the Nvidia GPU, the SoundFusion DSP takes some of the burden away from the processor. If a game demands 3D audio, but not MIDI sound, the DSP will focus its processing power on accelerating DirectSound 3D. On the other hand, if the user decides to listen to a WMA file, the DSP will reconfigure itself to optimise the WMA decoding process. Like the SoundBlaster Live, the SonicFury's advanced DSP design is engineered for the future, allowing upgrades to be made via software. Additional features include two, four and six channel output, EAX 2.0 compliancy, a large collection of useful software and a coaxial digital output for recording to MD or DAT.

Diamond MX400

The Diamond MonsterSound MX300, which featured an Aureal Vortex 2 processor, was an enormous success. Simply by virtue of its higher numbering, people will assume that the MX400 is a superior product to the MX300. Actually, the MX400 is more of a replacement, rather than an upgraded product. Aureal's bankruptcy has forced Diamond to revise their product line-up.

Eschewing the Aureal chipset with their latest card, Diamond have embraced the Canyon3D core logic chipset by ESS

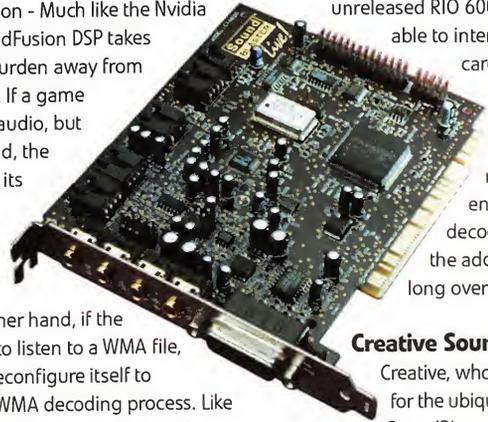
Technologies. The Canyon3D has been around since 1999, and is used in Formose and Terratec DMX sound cards. Besides its low cost, the Canyon3D has a variety of benefits. Principally, it is able to emulate EAX 2.0, via its Sensaura programming language in true quadrophonic sound. Owners of the unreleased RIO 600 ought to be able to interface with the card directly, via the RioPC card. Supposedly, this will allow for real-time MP3 encoding and decoding, although the add-on product is long overdue.

Creative Sound Blaster Live!

Creative, who are responsible for the ubiquitous range of SoundBlaster products, are regarded as the Microsoft of PC audio. The SoundBlaster Live, which is almost two years old, remains one of the most popular and capable cards on the market. Its powerful EMU10K1 processor DSP, which can perform more than 1,000 MIPS, allows the Sound Blaster Live the best sound quality, whilst offering the lowest resource drain (CPU utilisation) of any card on the market. Audiophiles should consider the SB Live Platinum, which includes an impressive array of jacks via the Live Drive connection interface.

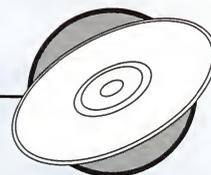
We Recommend:

Sound Blaster Live! Value
Available for less than \$100, the SB Live Value doesn't leave much to be desired. We love the ultra-low CPU utilisation, the excellent software support and the professional quality sound. A must.





Optical Drives



With the introduction of DVD-ROM, optical media moved from being simply a storage device to one that held high quality movies that can be played on your PC just as easily as they can be played on a TV. The DVD format can also hold data - from 4.7Gb to 17Gb depending the number of sides and layers used. This is a much needed upgrade from 650Mb for a standard 74 minute CD-ROM or 700Mb for the new 80 minute version. With backward compatibility with CD-ROMs, a DVD-ROM drive can quite happily replace your computer's CD drive.

Convergence

Firstly, region encoding. DVD movies are designed only to be played in the zone or region in which they are released. The world is broken up into six zones based on geographic area and display system used (PAL/NTSC/SECAM). Thus a film bought in Australia (region 4) cannot be played in the US (region 1) and vice versa. At least that's the theory; it seems that whenever some sort of copy protection is released there are people out there who find no greater joy than breaking it. In buying a drive just make sure that it's not completely region-locked.

MPEG-II compression is the way in which DVD movies are stored. To decompress the video stream you need quite a lot of system power - at least a 400MHz processor which will be more or less fully utilised to display the film. Now that the 1GHz barrier has been broken it's no longer such an issue, but to take a load off your CPU you could consider a dedicated decoder card. Such cards also give you S-Video TV-Out and have a digital SPDIF audio-out so you can hook it up to a Dolby Digital or Digital Theatre Sound (DTS) decoder. Essentially it will give you a low price home cinema solution.

CD deals

The humble CD-ROM is not dead, although it's heading that way fast. What CD-ROMs can claim that DVD drives cannot is having the best possible performance with CD-ROM media. This will become less important but for the moment there is one application that requires such performance - Digital Audio Extraction. If you want a mean mp3 ripping machine you'll get better performance if you stick with what you know.

Of course no rig could claim to be the ultimate without a burner to churn out custom CDs, backup data and perform

various other activities. Many purists will argue that SCSI is the only option for a CD-R or CD-RW setup but with today's powerful systems an IDE solution is more than adequate and won't spit out coasters like the early units. For absolute peace of mind, however, SCSI will have higher specs - but it's a photo finish.

For now recordable DVD is a fun toy but it's not really a viable option. Sure you can back up almost 5Gb on a single disk but it's slow and you can't read the disk on a regular DVD-ROM drive. Also, it costs more to make a copy of a DVD movie than to buy a retail disk. The technology will evolve but for the moment stay away.

We Recommend

Pioneer DVD-105S 16X/40X - the fastest DVD-ROM on the market made by the best manufacturer, the slot-loading feature is also very cool.

Kenwood True-X 72X - an audiophile's dream and the fastest CD-ROM drive available, Digital Audio Extraction is up to four times faster than any other drive on the market.

Plextor PlexWriter 12x4x32 Ultra Wide SCSI - the ultimate burner, you pay for it but Plextor is the best.

WRAP-UP

In sum, if you're after a serious gaming machine, but don't have piles of cash to throw at a new 1.13 GHz machine, then this is the system for you. This is not an entry-level system; this is a superior rig, available at a superior price.

SYSTEM SUMMARY

Motherboard

ASUS A7V

The most reliable, feature-rich Socket-A KT133 motherboard on the market. We love the Dip Switch overclocking options.

Hard Drive

IBM DeskStar 75GXP

With support for ATA/100, and a spindle speed of 7,200RPM, the 75GXP is the fastest IDE drive on the market.

Case

InWin Q500N Full-Tower

Roomy and sturdy. We love ours.

Monitor

Sony G400 19"

Stylish fusion of performance and good looks. Will look equally impressive on an executive's desk.

Soundcard

Creative SB Live! Value

The king of sound, available for less than \$100 (OEM)

CPU

AMD Duron 700

Even at stock speed, the Duron 700 is a seriously zippy processor.

Videocard

Undecided

With so many excellent 3D cards available, it comes down to price, availability and personal preference.

SETUP

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



DANIEL RUTTER WAXES TECHNICAL

WRITE TO:

SETUP

PC PowerPlay
PO BOX 634
Strawberry Hills
NSW 2016

setup@pcpowerplay.next.com.au
When you write

remember to include as much pertinent information as possible. Send your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT and any associated *.INI files for Windows that might tell me more about your problem. Give me as detailed an explanation as you can and be sure to include as much detail as possible about your PC.

Feel free to email your questions or, if you want to snail mail, please

remember to write clearly or better still print your letters. Please note that due to the volume of messages we receive, we cannot guarantee a response to all of your queries.

POLYCELERONULAR COMPUTING!

Q I am considering upgrading, and was just wondering whether it is possible to plug Celeron 2s straight into an Abit BP6 motherboard without any modifications or adaptors. I know BP6s are hard to find at the moment, but if I could find one, it would make a cheap and powerful SMP system.

Philip Smith

A Short answer: No. The BP6 doesn't support FC-PGA processors of any kind.

Long answer: Kind of. You DO have to use an adaptor. But still, really, no.

PowerLeap make a not-terribly-expensive PPGA to FC-PGA adaptor gizmo called the Neo-S370. Read all about it here:

<http://www.powerleap.com/Neo-S370/>

All the Neo-S370 - which costs about \$US25 - does is make an FC-PGA processor's pin-out match that of a PPGA CPU, and optionally change the Front Side Bus speed the processor says it wants. The adaptor doesn't convert the supply voltage, and it doesn't make processors that don't understand dual CPU operation suddenly work in a dual-chip board like the BP6. The Celeron is not meant to be dual-capable, of course, but the BP6 cheats and makes it possible; the same cheat does not work with newer Socket 370 CPUs.

Because the Neo-S370 doesn't convert the CPU supply voltage, you need a motherboard that can deliver the lower voltage the FC-PGA chips run from. FC-PGA PIIIs want 1.6V by default; FC-PGA Celerons want only 1.4V. The BP6 handles voltages as low as 1.3V, so this isn't a problem.

For Symmetric MultiProcessing (SMP) purposes, though, you're out of luck with FC-PGA Celerons, because none of them work in this mode. Some models of FC-PGA Pentium III work on

a BP6, or are supposed to, at least; there's more information on PowerLeap's site. But Celeron 2s are a dead loss.

PowerLeap are, as I write this, pretty close to releasing a new BP6-only Neo-S370 that ought to make the PIIIs that are meant to work in SMP actually, consistently, do so. But it won't make non-SMP processors work on a dual board.

If you don't already have a BP6, you don't need to buy one to do SMP with dual-capable FC-PGA PIIIs. "Slotket" adaptor boards that turn Socket 370 CPUs into Slot 1 ones will let you plug these CPUs into a regular dual processor motherboard. Use quality slotkets - I like Abit's amusingly named Slotket!!! - and a motherboard like ASUS' P2B-D and you're in business.

HOPEFUL OVERCLOCKER NO. 18273

Q I recently read your article on the new Celeron 2 processors, and noticed at the start of the article about shifting the FSB frequency of a Celeron 300A to 100MHz and making it a 450MHz processor.

Can you do this with all Celeron processors? If you can, how do you do it, and would I need to buy any extra cooling or fan systems for my processor? Are there any dangers involved?

I own a Celeron 466.

Dale Wright

A Celerons, like all recent Intel CPUs, run at a fixed multiple of the computer's Front Side Bus (FSB) speed. Their default FSB is 66MHz; increase the FSB and you increase the CPU speed. Simple enough.

But there are problems. Not all motherboards let you change the FSB manually at all - many motherboards just automatically detect the FSB the processor's meant to run at.

And there are limits to how far you can push a given CPU. Many of the old 300MHz Celerons were happy to run at

450MHz. But if you try a 100MHz FSB setting with a 466MHz Celeron, which uses a 7X multiplier to get 466MHz from its 66MHz stock FSB, then you're asking it to run at 700MHz. And it will not.

Well, maybe it will with really outrageous sub-zero cooling and a substantially increased core voltage (if you've got a motherboard that lets you tweak the core voltage - many don't), but it is NOT the way to bet.

If you can't manage 100MHz FSB, though, you can always try intermediate speeds. All motherboards that let you change the FSB manually support the 75MHz and 83MHz FSB settings. All but the fastest of the old model, Pentium I based, PPGA-package Celerons (which stop with the Celeron 533) are pretty much certain to work at 75MHz. But 75MHz only gives you 12.5% more core speed, so it's not worth getting excited about.

Your 466MHz Celeron might work at 83MHz FSB, for a better than 580MHz core speed - a more useful 25% overclock. If it does work at that speed, though, it'll probably only do it if you increase the core voltage (if your motherboard lets you). And higher voltage means higher heat, which may indeed be more than the stock Intel CPU cooler can handle, especially with its standard thermally conductive pad between the heatsink and the CPU, rather than a smear of after-market heatsink grease.

The Pentium III based, FC-PGA package Celerons (the 533A, 566 and so on) are more overclockable than the old ones, because of their "Coppermine" PIII based core. 83MHz is fine for pretty much all of them, and 100MHz or more isn't out of the question for 566s or even 600s.

EXOTIC ACCELERATOR

Q I have got myself a Dell Precision 410 NT workstation. This baby has Dual PIII 450, 256MB RAM, an 8Gb SCSI hard drive and last but not least an Oxygen GMX 2000 video card. As you can guess this computer was not purchased for gaming (3D Studio Max and Softimage).

However, I wish to purchase another, larger hard drive, install 98 on the original hard drive and move all my NT stuff onto

LETTER OF THE MONTH

WHY DO COMPUTERS CRASH?

Q> Why does a computer crash? How do I stop it from crashing, short of storing it away in a dark basement and never using it again?

A> That's a very good question. And the answer is simple - they don't. Well, OK, most of them do. But not all.

Crashes themselves are usually caused by software, which as the early computer developers discovered to their surprise is far, far, FAR more complex than hardware. It is literally impossible to tell in advance whether a given software configuration will crash or not. Every computer system has rules that hardware and software makers are supposed to stick to,

of course, but those rules are often a confusing furball of ad hoc additions and revisions, which may well be internally inconsistent. A few software-related crashes are actually caused by malicious software - viruses, Trojans and the like - but far more are caused by multiple pieces of fabulously complex software - definitely including Microsoft operating systems - that just don't play well together.

Hardware can cause crashes too, but even really cut-rate PCs generally have decently reliable hardware. When hardware fails, it usually just stops the machine completely, rather than makes it go flaky.

Big Iron, generally speaking, doesn't crash. Minicomputers and mainframes and other gear that's discussed at length in publications where terms like Customer Relationship

Management and Enterprise Systems Development can be used without the readers dying of boredom hardly ever do



anything that you or I would define as a "crash". These computers commonly stay "up" for years on end of hard work. And the reason for this remarkable reliability is straightforward enough - if a Serious Computer crashes, big money is lost. Kilobucks per second, for big organisations.

And then there are embedded systems - relatively low-powered computers that sit inside everything from cars to heart-lung machines, and had better not go nuts or someone could, quite possibly, die.

When the consequences of a failure are cremations, space probes plunging into the Pacific or thousands of users staring at a blank screen, there's a lot more reason to avoid that failure. People who engineer critical systems spend a lot more time thinking about everything that could go wrong, and either making it impossible or coming up with some elegant way to handle it.

But your desktop computer's not like that. The only person using it is you. And your list of priorities - and the PC market's list, too - does NOT have "bulletproof reliability" at the top.

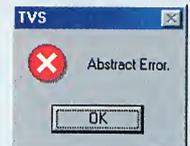
Would you buy a computer which was absolutely guaranteed not to crash, but which only ran ten year old games and cost half a million dollars? Nope. Computers have to be cheap, and software has to be released to a



LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS THE MOST EXCELLENT SIDEWINDER AND DUAL STRIKE CONTROL PADS FROM MICROSOFT'S PREMIERE RANGE OF GAME CONTROLLERS. CHEERS MICROSOFT!

schedule. If one company tries to make stuff that doesn't crash, it'll be slower to market and more expensive than its less reliability-focused competition, and it won't sell. The market will, demonstrably, put up with really miserable reliability as long as it gets cheap stuff fast.

Given the fact that the modern PC, even if it's got one big brand on it, contains components and software from dozens of different companies - and is the result of hundreds of bidding wars - the amazing thing is that PCs work so WELL, not that they crash.



the new drive. The 98 drive will then become my gaming world.

I've played Quake 2 and 3 on the NT setup at 1024x768, without a problem. I'm just wondering if the new drive I buy has to be SCSI like the old one? Or can I get an IDE drive, to run alongside my SCSI drive?

IDE is heaps cheaper, but is IDE slower as well, or is it just compatibility that I should be worried about?

The Oxygen card supports OpenGL. I'm guessing the purchase of another video card is going to be necessary for the Direct3D games, or is it just a driver issue? Will I still be able to have just the Oxygen card with DirectX installed for 98?

Darryl Mills

A> Plugging a cheap hard drive into the 410 shouldn't be a problem; according to its spec sheet, this workstation's got a plain IDE

controller as well as its SCSI one. IDE drives aren't, inherently, slower than SCSI ones with similar mechanisms; there's no significant performance difference for desktop computer purposes between any of the hard drives on the market today. But that's where the good news stops.

There's no Win98 driver for the GMX2000, full stop, as far as I can see. Which is a big problem. You CAN install another video card at the same time and have both cards work under Win98 (for multi-monitor tomfoolery), but ONLY if both cards have a 98 driver. And there are some other restrictions - just having a 98 driver doesn't mean a card will work as the primary board in a multi-monitor set-up.

You might be able to make the GMX2000 work as a plain 640 by 480

VGA board or something, but unless you could tell the BIOS to make your other, PCI, video card (whatever that happens to be), be your primary video card, you'd be unable to play games using the PCI card. And even if you COULD make the switch, it'd mean that NT would use the PCI card as ITS primary card until you changed it back.

And I don't even KNOW what NT would make of the dual-card setup in the first place.

It's a non-starter, sonny. Given the outrageous price of the GMX2000 board (still \$US1500, easily, even though it's a superseded product now...), you no doubt don't want to chuck it in the bin and replace it with a GeForce2 or something (which wouldn't STINK for workstation purposes, but would still lose to the Oxygen board).

TECH TIPS

Are you troubled by unsightly black icons in Windows? Well, if you're running Windows NT Service Pack 3, upgrade to SP4 or higher and they'll go away. Don't ask why, just do it. If you're running Windows 98, though, and you've got black or otherwise munged icons, the fix is simpler. Go to Display Properties -> Appearance, select Icon in the Item: drop-down menu, and do something to the Size setting to the right. Twitching it up from the default 32 to 33 will do. Hit Apply, and all of your icons will be re-rendered. Now set the size back down to 32, re-render the icons again, and hit OK. Presto, all fixed, until the blighters do it again. Incidentally, four out of five bastards agree that resizing someone's icons to the maximum setting, 72 pixels square, is a really good way to annoy them.



So, if you really want Win98, you are either going to have to power down and swap your video cards every time that you boot a different OS, or you are going to have to buy yourself another computer...

NO COMPRENDE CELERON...

Q> I have a PII motherboard that does not mention Celeron processors in the manual. Will it be able to have a Celeron 333A? I have tried it and it doesn't work, so is it a conflict, or is something broken?

Mark Zane

A> If some motherboards fail to recognise a processor, they'll fail to boot. But most of them can be cured with a BIOS update, when there aren't any big processor voltage issues - and there aren't, for older model Celerons like this.

Find out what model of board it is, go to the manufacturer's Web site, get the latest BIOS file and flashing program, follow the instructions in the manual. It's not a big deal, but with older boards like this you often need to move a jumper on the board to allow the BIOS to be flashed, then move it back afterwards.

If you're using a Socket 370 Celeron on a "slotket" adaptor board, make sure you've set any adaptor board jumpers to the default, pass-through setting, and you're not asking for 100MHz bus speed or some weird voltage or something.

MYSTERY MENU

Q> About a month ago I bought myself an extra hard drive which I made the primary, and I installed Windows 2000 on it. I did some experimenting on my secondary, Win98 hard drive, which eventually corrupted the whole of Windows, so I just reinstalled Win98 right over the top of the old install.

The new Win98 install would not boot, so I left it and stayed in Win2000. Just in case you wanted to know, to boot the separate operating systems I would go into BIOS and change which hard drive it would load first, letting me choose an OS. Here's the strange bit.

After reverting back to Win2000, every time I booted up it came up with this handy little utility which lets me choose my OS. I picked Win98 and lo and behold it actually booted up.

WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?

Whenever I try and boot win98 the normal way, it refuses to boot up, but by booting up win2000 and using the os chooser I can boot up Win98.

Can you please tell me something I can do so I can boot up without Win2000?

The Pimp, Email



A> As Microsoft put it, "this behaviour is by design". When you have a Windows 95/98 install somewhere on a machine and then install Windows NT or 2000 (which is really Windows NT 5), the NT-class operating system will detect the 95-class one and automatically add it to its boot menu. In the process of your reinstalls and upgrades and other fooling around, this clearly happened. Neat, ain't it?

Your semi-functional Win98 would be what's known in the trade as A Screwed Up Windows Install. They're about as common as, oh, ants. It's a machine with personality, like an English car. Learn to love it.

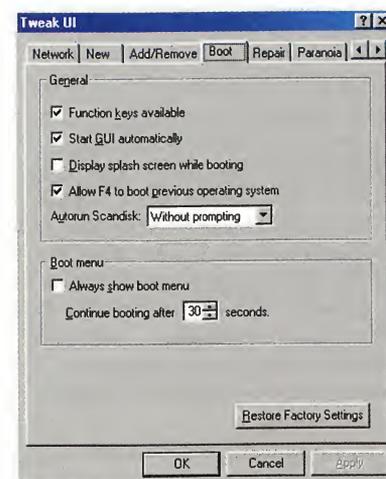
What can you do to get things working sanely again? Well, assuming you prefer doing the BIOS drive shuffle to using a simple boot menu (and I don't know why you would...), you can, to the tune of "Camptown Races":

Format drive and re-in-stall, doo-dah, doo-dah...

Or, at least, delete/rename the relevant Windows directory and do a full install, which makes a new, fresh Windows directory with no worrying references to the old one.

MADDENING MENU

Q> I had a few problems and rebooted in Safe Mode, but Windows decided that I wanted the choice every time I boot. Now I get the menu every time - how do I get back to getting the choices only when pressing F8?



A> That's an odd one, but you can fix it with TweakUI.

There's an "Always show boot menu" option in TweakUI's "Boot" tab.

You can find TweakUI for 95, along with the other 95 Power Toys, at <http://www.microsoft.com/windows95/downloads/contents/wutoys/w95pwrtoysset/>. TweakUI for Windows 98 is on the 98 CD, in the tools/reskit/powertoy subdirectory.

If the boot menu option's turned on, turn it off and reboot. If it's turned off, turn it ON and reboot, then turn it off and reboot again.

SQUEAKY CD

Q> My CD-ROM drive has started playing up recently. Whenever a CD is being read it makes a strange whistling, squeaking noise. It doesn't appear to affect the performance, but I'm worried it will damage my CD's. I think it is quad speed (it says 24X MAX on the front) and my computer is a P-200 with 32Mb RAM. I looked in the settings and noticed something about read ahead. Will this affect it at all? Does it just need to be cleaned or completely overhauled?

Joshua Geerlofs

A> If a CD-ROM drive squeaks, it's probably a dry bearing somewhere. Cheap, high rotational speed CD-ROMs often go dodgy after not very many hours of service. It's not at all likely that a noisy drive will harm your CDs, but it may well stop working soon.

The 24X on the front means it's a 24-speed drive, spinning at more than 4800 revolutions per minute. So it'd hardly be surprising if the bearings crapped out. Unbalanced CDs can contribute to this problem; cheap drives often have problems with vibration when a disc's not stable enough.

Read-ahead caching has nothing to do with the mechanical operation of the drive. Oiling a bearing might well fix the problem, but getting someone to do this for you would probably cost a large chunk of the price of a new drive. If it's the top clamp bearing then it'd be easy enough to do; if it's a motor bearing it'd probably be much more of a pain.

If it works, don't worry about it. If it dies, just get another drive.



MOTHERBOARDS BUILT FOR SPEED

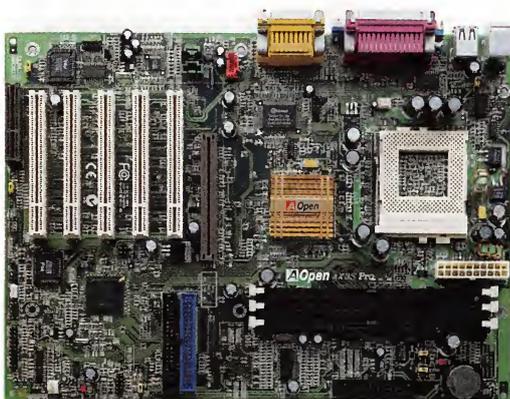
When we build a motherboard, you know it's going to have more than just plain guts.

It's going to be fast, lightning fast, to keep pace with the latest chips on the market. That's what you need in a motherboard.

Celeron, Pentium, Athlon, Duron – an AOpen motherboard can mix it with the best. And with Die Hard Bios in the Pro series you know, quick as a flash, our motherboards are champion performers.

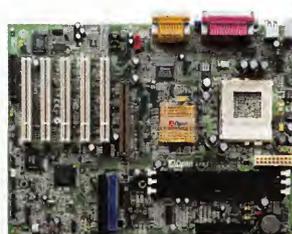
Don't spit chips. Check out the latest range of AOpen motherboards – if you can handle the pace.

Give us a quick call today about our motherboards.



AX34 Pro - VIA 694X

- Die Hard Bios with external switch • VIA 694X chipset
- Jumper-less design • Supports PC-133 RAM
- 4x AGP • Sound on-board



AX3S Pro - Intel 815E

- Supports Intel Celeron and Pentium III Socket 370 CPU • Die Hard Bios with external controller • Supports PC133 SDRAM DIMM • Enlarged 24K gold plated heatsink for chipset • Intergrated 2D/3D graphics engine with Dynamic Video Memory Technology: 4MB SDRAM display cache on board and one AGP slot for 4x/2x/1x AGP graphics card upgrade



MK33 - Duron 2 Athlon

- Supports AMD Athlon and Duron Socket A CPUs • Supports PC133 and VCM133 (virtual channel memory) DIMM • Supports 1x/2x/4x AGP mode • Resettable fuse providing short circuit protection for keyboard and USB device • ACPI S3 (suspend to RAM) and S4 (suspend to disk)



Mainboards



CD & DVD Roms



Sound Cards



Graphics Cards



Cases

AOpen[®]
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service for excellence

NSW: Best Byte (02) 9436 0788 • Paradigm X (02) 9524 6699 • Advanced Customised Computers (02) 9692 9988 **VIC:** Best Byte (03) 9561 8777 • Omega (03) 9800 3444 • Sato (03) 9899 6333 **QLD:** Compuworld (07) 3846 7588 • Omega (07) 3272 2386 • Intermedia (07) 3369 0477 • **QLD I.T.** (07) 4634 7999 • Sato (07) 32556899 **SA:** Crest (08) 8351 0500 • Omega (08) 8410 3434 **WA:** Direct Memory Access (08) 9445 9500 **ACT:** Cougar Computers (02) 6255 4333 **PNG:** Daltron Electronics (675) 325 6766. Servex Australia Pty Ltd, ACN 076 438 808. AOpen is a registered trademark of AOpen Inc. All other product, brand and company names are trademarks of their prospective owners.

M&ASER1006

CD POWERPLAY #53

Starting CD PowerPlay

Welcome to the latest edition of CD PowerPlay. This month's two discs include some of the hottest demos from around the world. Highlight of this month's selection is Activision's spine-tingling - and exhaustingly named - RPG, Vampire: The Masquerade - Redemption.

As always, navigation through the online menus is easy. Simply click on the category you want and then select the game or utility. We hope you enjoy this month's CD and hope to see you back next month for another dose of gaming goodness.

cdtech@powerplay.next.com.au

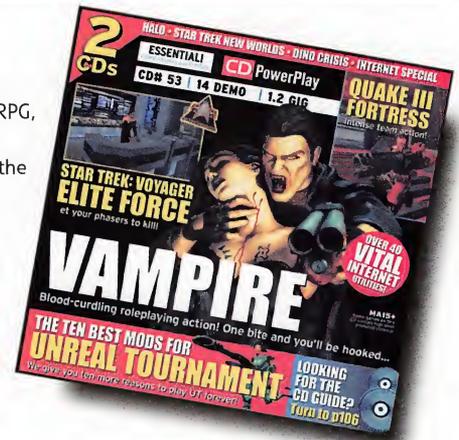
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PC PowerPlay CD Returns

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DISC 1

VAMPIRE THE MASQUERADE

Category: RPG

Developer: Activision

Need: P2-233, 64MB, SVGA, 3D Card

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: N/A

■ Feel what it is to be immortal. Before your fall, you led a crusade against evil. Now you've become one of the undead creatures you once battled - a Vampire. Inhabiting the World of Darkness you must face a series of brutal confrontations with your nemesis, Vukodlak, a powerful vampire lord. Your unholy showdown begins in medieval Europe and rages on into the modern day, as you track a soulless enemy in an eternal struggle to destroy him. For this is the only hope of vengeance for your tortured immortality.

This demo contains a single player level from the Dark Ages portion of Vampire: The Masquerade.



BANG! Gunship Elite

Category: Space Sim
Developer: Red Storm Entertainment
Need: P2-233, 32MB, SVGA, 3D Card
3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: TCP/IP
Bang! Gunship Elite offers incredible rendering techniques, real-time 3D universes, aliens, asteroids, mammoth vessels, aggressive fighters, and powerful weapons. You control Xaha, a young talented Arikhan fighter pilot. Your mission is to destroy the Dagon-bases as they are considered the brains in the Alliance. We know it won't be easy, but the entire planet is counting on you.

Div Games Studio

Category: Game Creating Tool
Developer: Fasttrack Software
Need: 486, 8MB, SVGA
3D: N/A

Multiplayer: N/A
DIV Games Studio provides you with a fun, exciting educational, and above all else an easy to use environment to let you create your OWN games. If you are young or old, whether you are into Retro Games or Futuristic RPG's, this program will set you on your way to making a game in minutes. DIV Games Studio uses a specially designed and much simplified coding language so that it is easy to follow and

requires NO previous knowledge of programming (*just the love of GAMES*). For those who wish to take it further, the language (code) can be extended and more features added through the use of the programming language C or C++. The games are created as an executable file (EXE) that can be distributed or sold in any way, without the need to pay any licenses or royalties.

Music 2000

Category: Music Creation
Developer: CodeMasters
Need: P233, 16MB, SVGA, Sound Card
3D: N/A

Multiplayer: N/A
The best selling PlayStation title has been massively upgraded for the PC - no other music maker can match MUSIC 2000 for the scale and depth of its easy to use musical and video features. And with creative tools like the unique Music Jam mode, Music 2000 is quite simply a cut above.



Quake III Fortress

Category: Quake 3 Addon
Developer: Q3F Development Team
Need: P200, 32MB, SVGA
3D: OpenGL, Direct 3D
Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX
Q3F is a modification (MOD) to Quake III Arena, creating a much more team-oriented experience. It implements a number of different player classes and equips them with unique weapons, strengths and abilities. A large part of the team-play aspect comes from Q3F's support for several game-objective possibilities, which include 'Capture the Flag', 'Command Point' and 'Capture and Hold' styles of play.

Hired Team: Trial

Category: 3D Action
Developer: New Media Generation
Need: P2-233, 64MB, SVGA,
3D: 3D Card, Direct3D
Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX,
Hired Team: Trial is a multiplayer game where you are in competition with other candidates to make the Hired Team. The Trial itself is consist of few different stages, such as:

Classic deathmatch

You're to kill all the other candidates without any pity. Fight to reach ultimate domination with the best frag score.

Team based games

You and your teammates should complete different tasks, i.e. stealing the enemy flag and bringing it to home base or secure valuable city structures from enemy squads, etc.

But before you join online battles you may fight against computer controlled opponents (bots). They are skilled for beginners and tough enough for experienced players.

INTERNET

Make the most of your online experience with these essential programs and utilities.

- Acrobat Reader 4.05b
- AllegroMail v. 2.2
- Arachnophilia 4.0
- AuctionTamer v. 4.0.6
- BuddyPad v. 1.5
- Copernic 2000 v. 4.5
- CuteFTP 4.0
- Email Remover v. 2.4
- Eudora Pro 4.3
- EZ-POP v. 2.8
- Forte Agent (Free Agent) v. 1.21
- GetRight 4.2
- Golden Retriever v. 1.2.1
- ICQ 2000a v. b4.29
- Internet Explorer 5.01
- MailAlert v. 2.33
- mIRC 5.7
- MoonWalker 2000 v.2.2.0
- Napster 2.0b6
- NeoPlanet v. 5.1
- Net Viewer v. 2.5
- NetCaptor v.6.01
- NetMonitor v. 2.5
- Netscape Communicator 4.7
- Opera v. 4.0
- Paste & Save v. 2000
- Pegasus Mail v. 3.12c
- PostCryptum v. 1.0
- PowWow v. 4.0
- PureSight v. 2.2
- QuantaZip v. 2.1
- Roger Wilco - Mark 1a
- StayOn Pro v. 3.20
- SurfSaver v. 2.1
- TextAloud MP3 v. 1.0
- TypeltIn v. 2.0
- Ultimark v. 3.1
- WebFerret v. 3.0100
- WebZip
- Window Washer v. 3.0
- Yahoo! Messenger v. 3.0

Infestation

Category: Action
Developer: UbiSoft
Need: P300, 32MB, SVGA, 3D Card
3D: Direct 3D
Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX
Infestation is a vehicle-based combat and exploration game with a large emphasis on diverse gameplay. The single player game features a mission-based campaign where the player is able to freely travel between twenty two different worlds, researching new weapons and vehicle modes as they progress. The multiplayer mode of the



game features four completely different game styles, including racing and football.

Play through the first two levels, and check out the cool Powerball multiplayer mode

UTILITIES

- Ulead Cool 3D
- Paint Shop Pro 6
- Toolbar Pro 4
- Winamp 2.62
- Winzip 8
- Winboost 2000
- PS2 Rate

MOVIES

- Blade
- Dragons Lair 3D Movie

PC GAMEGUIDE

There's developers all across the

world working hard every day and night



for years to get their

games made right. They put a hell of a lot of work in to them,

and they make 'em tough. That's where PC GameGuide comes

in. We've got



everything you'll ever need, and more.



You'll find more than your average walkthroughs in PC GameGuide -

we do so much more than the usual "go here, turn left, kill baddie". Once you've read one of our

playguides you'll know everything there is to know about that game.



But it's not just

walkthroughs that we pride ourselves on. General tips, gaming help, and strategies for a huge variety of

games are covered



in every issue.



All the hints to get you through the hard bits in all

the cool games. If you want it, we'll have it.



Because we go beyond the traditional 'walk-

throughs', you'll find out about all the secrets in the games, and you'll know



where all the weird

stuff happens.



In short, there's

enough material in every issue to allow you to live your

gaming lifestyle to the fullest. Live your life the way you

want, with **PC GAMEGUIDE** at your side.



DISC 1

BEST UNREAL TOURNAMENT MODS

More than any other firstperson shooter, Unreal Tournament is designed to be flexible for the player. It ships with a handful of mods, called mutators, that you can easily use to modify any of the game types. But these are just the beginning of game customization options. You can download player-made mutators and double-click on a "umod" file to install them. Then you can tweak the mods to your heart's content from within Unreal Tournament's shell screen. No other game has been so friendly to third-party mods. But for every excellent mutator, there are about a dozen awful ones.

Keep in mind that this list is by no means definitive. Not only are there other good mutators, but there are new ones being made all the time. We're looking forward to three in particular, all ports of Quake mods: Rocket Arena, Action Unreal Tournament, and Jailbreak. But in the meantime, we think the following are some of Unreal Tournament's best mutators.

DecalStay

Author Mike Lambert (Pipeline Productions)
Unreal Tournament uses images called decals to represent scorch marks, blood splatters, bullet holes, and Snot Gun stains. Because these images accumulate over time, they can hog up an increasing amount of memory if a game goes on for too long. To prevent this, Unreal Tournament erases older decals fairly quickly. DecalStay overrides this feature by letting you configure how long decals remain. You can set a length of time for them to stay, or you can make them permanent if you think your hardware can handle the extra burden.

UWar

Author Ob1-Kenobi
UWar adds a power-up system to Unreal Tournament that allows you to increase your speed and jumping, multiply the damage you inflict, regenerate your health automatically, and reduce the damage you take when you're hit. When you frag someone, a floating letter, corresponding to one of these abilities, jumps out of that player's body. As you accumulate letters, the level of those particular abilities

increases, and, in team games, you can share power-ups by dropping them for someone else to pick up.

BoomDeath Mutator

This mutator creates the potential for a delicious little surprise with every frag. The mod allows the server operator to set the frequency for a BoomDeath incident to occur. It's a percentage chance that anytime someone dies, he or she will explode with the force of the Redeemer - in effect, the dying player will become ground zero. If any players die in the ensuing blast, the person who exploded will get the points for fragging them.

SlaveMaster

SlaveMaster is one of the most clever and innovative mods for a first-person shooter we've seen since Jailbreak. When you frag someone, he turns into a ghostly figure who can't fight until he's earned enough points to get back into the game. To earn points, he has to float around the level and perform tasks for you. He is the servant and you are his master. He can pick up weapons, ammo, and power-ups, each worth various amounts of points. Or he can tag your opponents with soul flares so you can track them for easier kills. There's an elaborate scoring system, so the more valuable your help to your master, the sooner you'll come back as a regular combatant and the more stuff you'll have when you respawn.

Unreal Tournament Bonus Pack

Author Epic Games
This isn't just a mutator, because it also adds some new maps and player skins. The Bonus Pack also adds Epic's runes to the mutator list. Pick up a rune and you have a special power, but choose wisely, because you can carry only one. There are runes for extra damage, regeneration, extra shielding, and added speed. The Relic of Vengeance explodes like a Redeemer a second after you've been killed, ideally taking out your killer. When you've been fragged, the Relic of Redemption respawns you with your inventory intact and your health restored. And, more importantly, it doesn't give your killer the frag!

Holy Wars

Author Sten Larsson and Thomas Ericsson (Flatware Design)
This variation on tag makes one player the saint and everyone else a sinner. The saint is the first person to pick up a glowing halo that spawns on the map. From that point on, everyone is out to get the halo and become the saint. The reason you want to be the saint is because this is the best way to get frags. The saint can frag anyone, but sinners can only frag the saint. Sinners who break the rules by killing other sinners lose points and eventually become fair game for everyone.

Carry the Flag

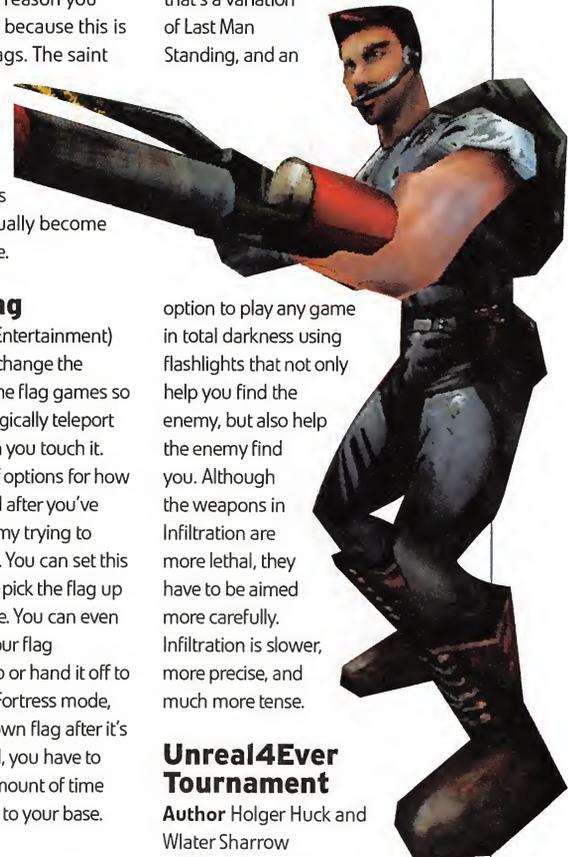
Author Versix (Nexus Entertainment)
Carry the Flag lets you change the mechanics of capture the flag games so the flag doesn't just magically teleport back to your base when you touch it. There's a wide range of options for how your flag can be moved after you've wrested it from an enemy trying to carry it back to his base. You can set this mutator so you have to pick the flag up and carry it back to base. You can even set it so you can hide your flag somewhere on the map or hand it off to other players. In Team Fortress mode, you can't pick up your own flag after it's been dropped - instead, you have to defend it for a preset amount of time before it is zapped back to your base.

NIUT

Author Mike Fox
NIUT stands for No Item Unreal Tournament, a mutator that removes all the weapons, ammo, and power-ups from a map. Instead of running around to find equipment - which favors the players who time the spawn cycle - every player starts with the same weapon. After a configurable period of time, that weapon changes either randomly or according to a list you set up. One minute you and your opponent are circle strafing each other with chain guns; the next you're lining up multiple rocket shots at one another from across the room. If you want, you can also have jump boots, invisibility, and the damage amplifier make random appearances among all the players.

Infiltration

Author Jesse Warren Taylor
Infiltration makes Unreal Tournament much more, uh, real. This mutator swaps out all of those fantasy weapons and puts in the sort of realistic guns you'd find in Rogue Spear. It also puts in a new damage model, radar to find the other players, a stand-off game type that's a variation of Last Man Standing, and an



option to play any game in total darkness using flashlights that not only help you find the enemy, but also help the enemy find you. Although the weapons in Infiltration are more lethal, they have to be aimed more carefully. Infiltration is slower, more precise, and much more tense.

Unreal4Ever Tournament

Author Holger Huck and Wlaler Sharrow
It's hard to believe that Unreal's weapons could be made even crazier, but this is exactly what Unreal4Ever Tournament (U4ET) does. It adds 34 new weapons. Not just new weapons, but wildly inventive, fun, fall-out-of-your-chair-laughing, wacky weapons. That's 34, each with primary and secondary firing modes.

Some of the weapons are just big guns, like the sawed-off shotgun, the Vulcan Cannon, the rail gun, or the Flak Cannon's big brother, the massive Howitzer. Some of the weapons are mildly realistic, like the M-16, the pitchfork, the chainsaw, the Python revolver, or the Compound Bow, which works almost like the Snot Gun - pull back the button and then hold it down until you're ready to fire.

DREAMCAST » XBOX » PS2 » PC » PLAYSTATION » N64 » GAME BOY

EXCLUSIVE FIRST REVIEW

FINAL FANTASY IX

IS IT THE LAST GREAT
PLAYSTATION GAME?

HYPERR»»

ON SALE
AUGUST **23**



DISC 2



Halo

Special Preview
Bungie Software

Halo takes place on an artificial Ringworld-style planet orbiting a gas giant in another system, much like the vision of Larry Niven's Ringworld universe. While exploring the planet, humans have found new technology that we just have to have, even at the cost of lives. To complicate matters, another alien race is bent on obtaining this technology, and both races must fight to achieve dominance in this system.

This preview shows heaps of in-game stuff, and is a rather high video quality.

Dino Crisis

Category: Action/Adventure
Developer: Capcom
Need: P200, 32MB, SVGA
3D: Direct 3D
Multiplayer: N/A

In Dino Crisis, players assume the

role of Regina, a member of a special force operative team. Regina and her team of government agents have orders to capture Professor Kirk and seize the details of his research. Once a tropical paradise, the island now runs rampant with carnivorous dinosaurs, including Raptors and T-Rex's that haven't roamed the earth in millions of years. Your mission is simple, find Professor Kirk and get off the island ALIVE.

This demo has a 10 minute time limit. Press A to start the game, F9 to quit out.



3D Ultra Pinball: Thrillride

Category: Pinball Sim
Developer: Sierra
Need: P133, 32MB, SVGA
3D: N/A

Multiplayer: 2 Player mode
The latest in the 3D Ultra Pinball series, Thrill Ride is based on real-life amusement park rides from Pennsylvania's Hershey Park. Thrillride offers the fun of a complete amusement park experience. There's 15 rides and they're all fun, easy, and colourful.

Demo will let you play until you earn 2,000,000 points.

CONTROL KEYS

Left Flipper Left Shift
Right Flipper Right Shift
Left Nudge Z
Right Nudge /
Center Nudge Space
Plunger Down Arrow
Full-Screen/Window toggle F5
Exit the demo ESC

Star Trek: New Worlds

Category: Real Time Strategy
Developer: Interplay
Need: P2-300, 64 MB, SVGA, 3D Card
3D: Direct 3D
Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX

Star Trek: New Worlds presents the Star Trek universe as never seen before. Set in the 23rd Century - the year 2292 - the game chronicles the challenges and adventures of a small group of colonial officers on the surfaces of new alien worlds.

Choosing to play as the Federation, Klingons or the Romulans, the player must meet a series of challenges. Playing as a different race not only provides a



new complement of buildings and vehicles, all with their own graphical styles, but also allows the player to experience a new style of game play.

SuperChix 76

Category: Racing Sim
Developer: Fiendish Games
Need: P2-233, 32MB, SVGA, 3D Card
3D: Direct 3D
Multiplayer: N/A

Those sexy 70s soul sirens are back for another round of hot racing action in Fiendish Games' latest arcade racer! SuperChix '76 is a no-holds-barred, rally-style challenge featuring awesome American muscle cars.

Combat Mission: Beyond Overlord

Category: Turn Based Strategy
Developer: Battlefront
Need: P200, 16MB, SVGA, 3D Card
3D: Direct 3D
Multiplayer: N/A

Combat Mission: Beyond Overlord takes you from Normandy 1944 to Germany 1945 on World War Two's Western Front. CM provides all this and more with its historical scenarios and campaigns. And if there is a battle that isn't covered, make it up yourself with the easy to use editor.

Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force

Category: Action/3D
Developer: Activision
Need: P233, 64MB, SVGA, 3D Card
3D: OpenGL
Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX

When a marauding species captures the U.S.S. Voyager, only a member of the newly formed elite security force - The Hazard Team - can save the crew, the ship... and the Galaxy itself. Commanded by Lt. Tuvok, you'll leap into action to defend the Voyager from assault, battle through derelict spacecraft, infiltrate a Borg cube and take on the ultimate colonization force - all the while facing annihilation at every turn. No one said being a hero was easy.

Mouse Controls

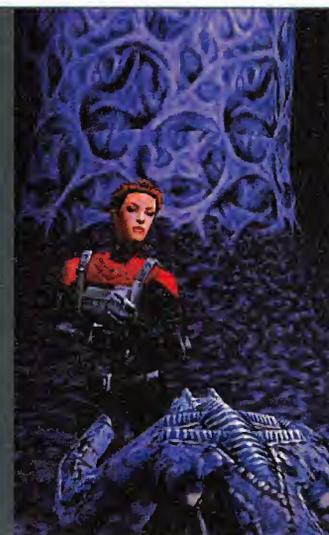
Look Left/Right/Up/Down Mouse Movement
Move Forward Right Mouse Button
Fire Left Mouse Button
Secondary Fire Middle Mouse Button
Switch Weapons Mouse Wheel Up/Down

Keyboard Controls

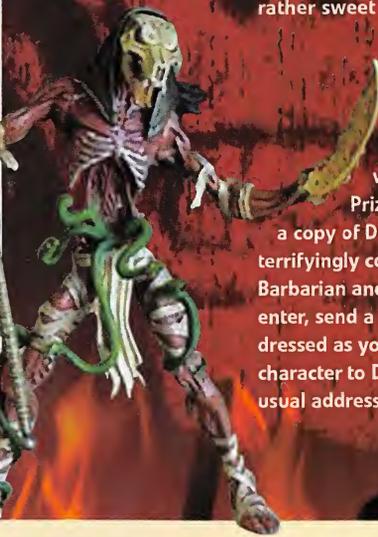
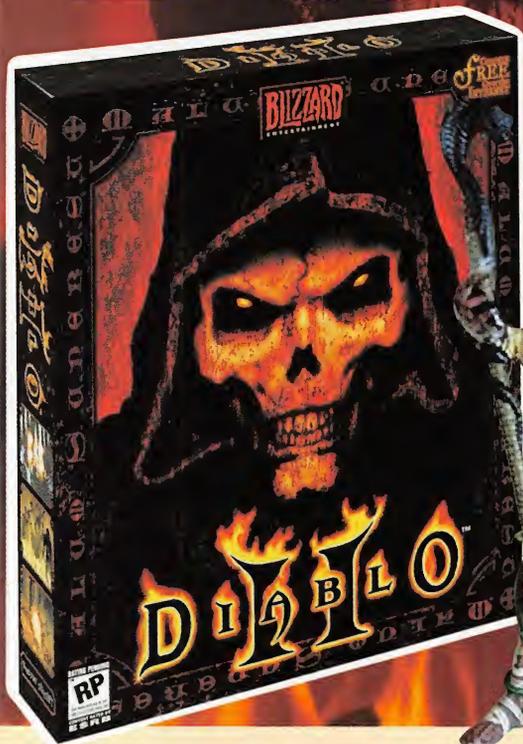
Forward/Back Up Arrow/Down Arrow
Run Shift (Left or Right, Hold Down)
Use/Open Spacebar
Jump / or D
Select Weapon 1 - 9 (Not on Number Pad)

Special Commands

Crouch N or C
Select Prev/Next Item [or]



DIABLO II



For the 5 people out there who haven't already run out and bought themselves a copy of Diablo II, the benevolent folks at Havas have bestowed upon us 5 copies of the game and some rather sweet extras.

Four runners up will receive a copy of Diablo II and a chic Diablo II T-shirt, while the lucky First Prize winner will receive a copy of Diablo II, a T-shirt and terrifyingly cool Necromancer, Barbarian and Diablo Figurines. To enter, send a photo of yourself dressed as your favourite Diablo II character to Diablo II Comp at the usual address.

VIDEO LOGIC

Fed up with your tinny speakers and Gravis 4-bit sound card? For your aural pleasure, Videologic have provided us with a fully-featured multimedia rig to give away. Up for grabs is a set of Videologic Sirocco Crossfire Speakers (reviewed in PCPP#51) and the Videologic Sonic Fury Soundcard. Worth over \$1000, this block-rocking setup will be the envy of your friends, and the bane of your elderly neighbours. So, if you think you have the rapping ability of MC Hammer, the dulcets of Johnny Rotten, and the musical ability of a punch-drunk protozoa, contact us! Besides the Videologic package, the winning tune will be featured on next month's coverdisc.

YOU CAN EITHER:
Send An Mp3 (not more than 500k in size) of your original PCPowerPlay jingle (complete with original lyrics) to:
hughns@next.com.au

OR

Send a cassette/MD of your masterpiece to:
Videologic Comp at the usual address.



WHERE TO SEND

Write the answer, along with your name and address on the back of an envelope.

TIP: Do not forget to put the competition name on the front of the envelope.

All entries close October 3rd.
SEND TO:
PC PowerPlay
78 Renwick St.
Redfern NSW, 2016

PCPP 51 WINNERS

Best of Special Forces
• L. Panton,
Maidavale WA

Vampire
• D. Macreadie,
Devon Hills TAS
• M. Trueman,
Albany WA
• S. Bannerman,
Howard Springs NT

Monkey Hall Of Fame

■ Hello friends!

Today is a golden age for gamers everywhere. Not only am I on the verge of international stardom but the conquest of games by my primate brothers continues unabated. Monkeys are not only more prominent today, they're not as stereotyped as they once were. Just take a glance at the list below to see all varieties of monkeys represented.

Now is truly a time to look back and remember the greatest gaming monkeys of all time. Sit back, grab a banana and keep the kleenex handy for this: all your favourites and their magic - and tragic - stories!

Tony the Reviewing Monkey

1. DONKEY KONG

I hear what you're saying, the guy's never been on a PC, but we're not platform bigots here, okay? This guy goes way back - in the distant past, he tossed barrels on poor Mario's head and jumped up and down in handheld LCD. Well truly grown up now, he's at his best on the racetracks of MarioKart 64, in my opinion. He's got a glorious growl and a heart of gold. Here's to you, champion!



baying for blood, just ask anyone who wet themselves whilst in the grip of System Shock 2. Slapstick comedy and general monkey play are usually our forte, but we monkeys don't take offence at the violence portrayed against us because we give as good as we get.

2. MONKEY ISLAND SERIES

Yes, yes. The joke IS that the biggest monkey in any of these games is Guybrush himself. While not a bona fide monkey himself, Guybrush seems to have been amongst the chimps too long because he's always been swinging from the trees (if you know what I mean). Well, in any case, a good time was had by all, not least the chattering, whooping monkeys. Pirates and primates, I'm laughing already! But don't forget, the monkeys are listening...



4. SAM & MAX HIT THE ROAD

Though a distant cousin to us monkeys, the Bigfoot community gets a shout out here for all of its tireless work with the dog and the bunny. Keep that grunting and embarrassing behaviour up and the pants down! We wouldn't have it any other way.

5. BLACK & WHITE

If I was a powerful primitive god, I would be unable to stop myself from making use of an innocent little chimp... to twist and bend until it became a behemoth killing machine at my beck and call! Molyneux wins big for size as these are the biggest damned monkeys I've ever seen. And



talk about ugly! You're doing us proud, babe! If you've been to a zoo lately, you can just imagine the toilet situation...

6. DISCWORLD

More an ape than a monkey, the librarian proved that you don't need to be clean, polite or nice to get the job done. Some words of wisdom from the magician turned ape? "Ook ook OOOK ook ook ookk. OOOOOKKK ook OOOK!"

7. TONY

Well, I don't like to blow my own trumpet (especially when others can do it for me) but I just have to say that I am the most happening monkey in games journalism today. Not content to just review games, I even play them too - some right to the middle or even the end! And yo, I could be in my very own platformer for the PC in the near future. It's all very hush-hush just now but...

8. JOHN ROMERO

We'd never seen a colossal debacle in the history of gaming like Daikatana. Many could see where the whole ill-starred thing was going but if nothing else John has balls. It just goes to prove that in the business of game development all you need is ego. Did you hear ME? EGO!

BLIZZARD'S OFFICIAL DIABLO II STRATEGY

READ THE FOLLOWING EXCERPTS EXCLUSIVE TO PC POWERPLAY!

GENERAL TIPS

Click the left mouse button in a rapid, rhythmic fashion.

ADVANCED STRATEGIES

Click even faster!

TRICKY BITS



COMPLETE WALKTHROUGH

Click.Click. Click-click-dick. Click. Click-click. Repeat ad nauseum...

PLANESCAPE TONY (With apologies and kind devotion to Black Isle Studios)



NEXT MONTH

PCPowerPlay

What will be on the cover in November?

Here are the nominees...



• STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE



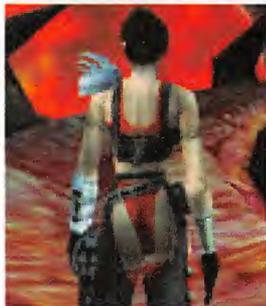
• THE SIMS LIVIN' LARGE



• AGE OF KINGS: THE CONQUERORS



• GIANTS



• TRIBES 2

• QUAKE III TEAM ARENA



• CRIMSON SKIES



• HEAVY METAL FAKK2



• RED ALERT 2



• TONY HAWK PRO SKATER 2



FIND OUT WHEN PCPP#54 IS ON SALE OCTOBER 4, 2000

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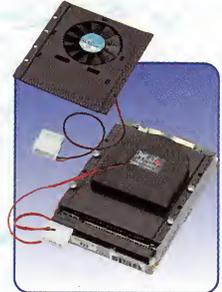
Please see us at
Interact and IT
2000 Melbourne,
Stand G1.
 29th August to
 1st September

Worldwide Patents

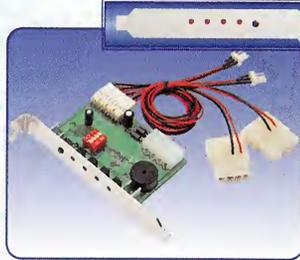


DR-100
 Just cooler system de-HUMIDIFIER

HD-600
 New Design for HARD DISK
 • Extend HARD DISK life and reliability.
 • **ANTI-DUST** and simple installation.
 • Airflow : 18CFM



FA-100 FAN ALARM
FEATURES & BENEFIT
 • Almighty protection to your computer system through FA-100 Buzzer sound and pilot indication.
 • Coolers failure or mal-function will be detected.
 • Built in outlets will allow you to use 3 pin or 4 pin plug.
 • Easy installation and system cooling is fully guaranteed.
 • Reset switch serves as silencer to user before replacement.



SS-100
 Protect a system against accidental power On/Off & Reset by installing an Intelligent electronic security guard. Changeable PIN prevents unauthorised access to your data. Built-in timer allows variable operation time. A timer countdown can be set to turn off your PC.



NB-600
 Reduce your notebook's operating temperature with three Ultra slim exhaustion fans. Avoid system lock-ups, extend a notebook's lifetime.

System Fan



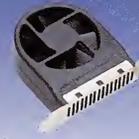
FC-900L
 • Extra long duct mainboard internal cooler



ST-900
 • Mainboard cooling kit fit into a 3.5" bay



FC-500PS
 • FC-500 With installation adaptor.
 • Fits for print port and slot.



FC-100
 • Dimension: 120 X 90 X 27mm
 • Airflow: 32 CFM
 • Voltage: 12V
 • System cooler for Pentium II & A.G.P. Card



FC-200
 • Dimension: 108 X 90 X 27mm
 • Airflow: 32 CFM
 • Voltage: 12V
 • System cooler for server, raid, industrial computer (on SCSI port)

TT-900 Twin Turbo:
FEATURE & BENEFITS
 • Dual 9CM Fans / 80CFM
 • Fits any 5.25" Bay
 • High Performance and Low noise
 • Easy Installation



Monitor Cooler



MC-100

NoteBook Cooler



NB-100

HDD Cooler



5.25" Bay

3.5" Bay

CPU Cooler / Second Fan



P-02SII
 For SECCII & Pentium III



P-03A for Pentium II & Athlon/K7



P-200
 for Pentium & K6



SF-600 (60 X 60 X 25mm)
SF-800 (80 X 80 X 25mm)
SF-801(3 wire) (80 X 80 X 25mm)
SF-900 (92 X 92 X 25mm)



P-22SII (Dual Fans)
 For SECCII & Pentium III



P-22A (Dual Fans)
 For Pentium II & Athlon/K7



P-500
 For Socket 7, Socket 370 300Mhz and up



CS-100
 Chipset cooler for AGP CARDS, MAINBOARDS.



P-32SII (Three Fans)
 For SECCII & Pentium III



P-05A (Three Fans)
 For Pentium II & Athlon/K7



P-600 (6cm Fan)
 For Socket 7, Socket 370 500Mhz and up



P-02C
 For celeron



P-22C (Dual Fans)
 For celeron



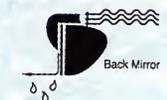
CH-410
 For AGP Gard, Voodoo Card.



CH-420
 For AGP Gard, Voodoo Card.

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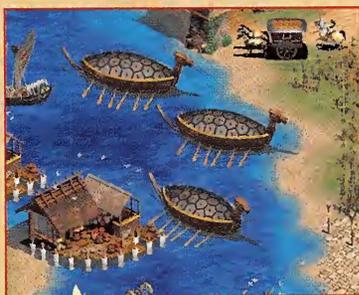


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